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DRYING PALESTINE: ISRAEL'S SYSTEMIC WATER WAR

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Israel's Water Warfare

Israel has deliberately and systemically targeted Palestinians' water infrastructure for decades. Its policy is nothing less than a war on Palestinian access to water, which undermines Palestinian resistance and has ramifications that include long-term environmental degradation, both short and long-term dangers to public health, and hugely affects economic production.

Israel's sustained attack on Palestinian water infrastructure has been waged on two fronts: direct and extensive damage caused deliberately during large-scale military operations and long-term damage done by preventing the repair, maintenance, or development of water infrastructure.

Targeting Water Infrastructure During Military Operations

In each of Israel's assaults on Gaza over the past decade, bombardments have targeted water infrastructure, from the main power stations to wastewater treatment centers and water networks. Within this framework, the siege on Gaza can – and should – be understood as a continuation of the policy of targeting water infrastructure. Restrictions on the import of spare parts and general construction materials mean that the damage sustained during times of assault is remains for years after. Without repair, lasting damage is also being done to Gaza's land.

Long-Term Water War Across Occupied Zones

Even more insidious has been the slow but deliberate damage to water infrastructure carried out in the West Bank, particularly in Area C, as well as the declared "buffer zone" around the Gaza Strip. Palestinians in the West Bank must apply for permission to Israeli authorities in order to maintain, build, or expand water infrastructure. When permission is – almost inevitably – denied, civilians are forced to build without such permission. Demolition has become the new norm in areas under total Israeli control, with declared military zones, firing ranges, or areas declared a threat to security regularly bulldozed.

Without access to regular, clean and reliable sources of water, industrial, agricultural and trade activities decline, causing economic meltdown. Without a change, the Palestinian economy has little hope for growth in the long term.

Changing Relationships With the Land

Over the long term, Israel's targeting of water infrastructure also deeply influences the relationship that Palestinians have with their land. By depriving farmers of water, they drive them off their land. Denying herders access to age-old cisterns cuts off traditional livelihoods and depletes resource-rich villages of jobs, families, and traditions.

In the long run, Israel's water war will destroy the organic relationship that cities, towns, and villages have with local water resources and change once-locally managed water resources into a commodity; one that is, moreover, controlled by Israel.

Political pressure to protect water infrastructure

Donor intervention in the field of water must go from providing temporary solutions to putting active political pressure on Israel so that its military forces cease their strategic destruction of water infrastructure. Meanwhile, some NGO and civil society groups are exploring alternative ways to hold Israel accountable for its water violations, actions that should be seen as a model and be built on further.

Community leaders must embrace water rights as an important element in their popular struggle against occupation.

1. Given the current situation, civil society must:
 - Draw attention to instances of damage or attempted damage due to the targeting of infrastructure.
 - Form coalitions for mutual support.
 - Organize and maintain a comprehensive database of destruction of water infrastructure as well as lists of those affected and the long-term ramifications of the destruction.
2. Grassroots movements must:
 - Put the right to water on the agenda, in particular within Palestine's popular struggle committees so that the right to water gets a place on the political agenda.
 - Form bonds with other indigenous communities striving for water justice.
 - Use the struggle for the protection of water resources as a locus of mobilization for global indigenous campaigns.
3. The Palestine Liberation Organization/Palestinian Authority must
 - Further document Israel's violations.
 - Use its member state status at the United Nations to hold it accountable through the UN System.
4. Governments and key intergovernmental organizations like the UN must:



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- Hold Israel accountable for all its human rights violations and must include the right to water in this equation.
- Insist that Israel compensate donors for the loss of infrastructure put in place by international bodies. Compensation for donor investments must be claimed.

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