

## Taking control of water sources

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The Jordan Valley area is considered one of the areas of the West Bank with the richest natural water sources. Under international law, most of these water sources belong to the Palestinians, while a smaller portion are to be shared by the Palestinians and Israel. Despite this, Israel has taken control of most of the water sources in the area and has earmarked the use of most of the resources exclusively for the settlers in the area, while ignoring Palestinian communities and the chronic water shortage in the rest of the West Bank.



**Left: Ein al-'Uja spring in better days. Photo: Itamar Grinberg. The dry 'Ein Uja spring today. Photo: Eyal Hareuveni, B'Tselem, 23 March 2011**

Israel prevents Palestinian access to the waters of the Jordan River basin, from which the Palestinians demand 200 million m<sup>3</sup> of water. Water installations belonging to Israel, Syria, and Jordan have reduced the water flow in the Jordan river by 98 percent, compared to its natural water flow in the 1940s. As a result, sections of the river have dried up and the Dead Sea's water level is dropping by one meter a year.

Most of the Israeli water drillings in the West Bank – 28 of the 42 drillings – are in the Jordan Valley. From these 28 drillings, Israel pumps 32 million m<sup>3</sup>, most for settlement use, with a small amount

going to Palestinian villages. Israel also draws water from the Tirza artificial reservoir, in the center of the Jordan Valley, for farming use in the settlements. Treated wastewater from Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and from the Adumim Bloc settlements are also used for these agricultural purposes.

In total, 44 million m<sup>3</sup> of water a year is allocated to fewer than 10,000 settlers living in the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea area. This amount is almost one-third the amount of water accessible to the 2.5 million Palestinians living in the West Bank. The generous allocation to the settlements has enabled them to develop intensive agriculture that operates year round. These settlements also benefit from a per capita daily allocation of 487 liters for their household needs, a quantity three times higher than household water consumption inside Israel.

By contrast, Palestinians in the area suffer from a severe water shortage. Israeli control of the water sources has dried up Palestinian wells and diminished the quantity of water supplied by Palestinian wells and springs. The Palestinians currently operate 89 wells in the area, compared to 209 before 1967. In 2008, Palestinians drew 31 million m<sup>3</sup> of water from the wells and springs. This figure is 44 percent lower than the quantity of water that was produced prior to the Interim Agreement, in 1995. The reduction in the amount of water accessible to Palestinians led to a decline in the amount of land cultivated by Palestinians and to a drop in competitiveness of the crops they grow. The percentage of farmland being worked in the Jericho area is the lowest of all the governorates in the West Bank – 4.7 percent, compared with an overall average of 25 percent.

Israel's control of most of the land in the area prevents Palestinians from moving water from areas rich in water to distant Palestinian communities, and to Palestinian communities outside the Jordan Valley. As a result, water consumption in some Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley is less than 40 percent of the WHO's minimal recommended consumption of 100 liters a day. Consumption in small Bedouin communities, which are not connected to a water system, is just 20 liters, a quantity that the WHO classifies as the amount necessary for "short-term survival" in humanitarian disaster areas such as refugee camps in Darfur, or in Haiti following the earthquake there.

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