

Running head: WATER CRISIS IN THE WEST BANK

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Water Crisis in the West Bank

## Introduction

What has the world come to? For the past sixty-five years, an ethnic cleansing has been occurring. For the past sixty-five years, displacement has been taking place. For the past sixty-five years, one group of people makes up the greatest portion of refugees, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine. For the past sixty-five years, Palestinians have been deprived of their basic human rights. Today, a water crisis is at hand. This water crisis is not caused by natural droughts nor anything of that matter; rather, it is caused by a discriminatory allocation of water that favors Israel.

One of the main perpetrators of this discriminatory water allocation is the signing of the Oslo Accords. These Accords were signed in Oslo, Norway in 1993, where the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israeli leaders came together to create and sign the Accords in complete secrecy, without intermediaries (PBS, n.d.). Since the Oslo Accords were signed, which had Israel and the PLO recognize each other, it was agreed that “80% of water in the West Bank pumped from the mountain aquifer—a joint Israeli-Palestinian resource—would be allotted to Israeli use and the remaining 20% for Palestinian use” (B’Tselem, n.d.).

## Measurement of the Issue

As a result, average consumption in the West Bank in 2011 was 73 liters per day, which is below the WHO’s and UNAID’s recommendation of at least 100 liters per day.



Figure 1

As the graph shows (Figure 1), residents in the West Bank are suffering from severe water shortages, which can be prevented. On the other-hand, Israel's average consumption of water was 183 liters per person, per day. This does not include Israel's industrial usage, as B'Tselem, an Israeli non-governmental organization that focuses on human rights in the Occupied Territories says.

To make matters worse for the Palestinians, the water they purchase must come from Mekorot, Israel's national water company (B'Tselem, n.d.), which is very expensive for the residents of the developing Territories. Likewise, during the summer months, Palestinian communities and neighborhoods are put on water-rotations, where they go through periods of time without water. This is in sharp contrast with their Israeli neighbors, who have an unlimited water supply. Because of these water shortages, not only do Palestinians have to start leasing back land from Israeli settlers in occupied territories to survive, but Palestinian farmers are also being replaced in the food market, which negatively affects their economy and independence.

### Case Studies

In the Jordan Valley, "Palestinians are forced to lease the land from the settlers because of a shortage of land and water..." (Hass, 2013). Although this leasing of land to non-Israeli's is illegal, Israeli settlers are leasing their land to Palestinians anyway because the small number of settlers are not enough to care for the massive amount of land the Israeli government has allocated to them since the occupation of the West Bank (Hass, 2013).



Figure 2. Palestinian leasing land from Israeli settler in Jordan Valley.

Although the Palestinian Authority (PA) would like to see the Jordan Valley as an area where the Palestinians can settle and develop, the Oslo Accords are preventing this from happening. The reason for this is that “Israel still controls the water resources of the West Bank and sets the water quotas for the Palestinians through its veto on all new water drilling for Palestinians, and its refusal to the reconstruction of wells that have been ruined (Hass, 2013). Therefore, not only can the Palestinians living near the Jordan Valley not have their own wells or create water drilling projects to become self-sustaining, but they must lease land from Israeli settlers in order to survive-and that itself is not even legal under the laws of Israel.

Another problem with the forced water shortage in the West Bank is that the agriculture of the Palestinians is also being affected. As a result of that, their economic situation is also not ideal. A good example of this is Beit Ummar. Beit Ummar, a municipality in the West Bank, used to be called the fruit basket of Palestine because of all the leafy greens, colored fruits, and abundance of olive trees it housed. Now, because of the water shortage in the West Bank, that is no longer the case. According to Anna Lekas Miller, an independent journalist who has written for *The Guardian*, *The Daily Beast*, and *Alternet* writes, “Many [Palestinian] farmers have foregone harvesting their crops because the yield and the quality are no longer worth it. Israeli farmers with similar crops have replaced Palestinian famers in the markets, further economically marginalizing an already disenfranchised people” (Miller, 2012). The reason the Palestinian farmers in Beit Ummar are suffering is because they are relying on inconsistent rainwater for irrigation as a result of the water shortage. However, this dry and dusty municipality is in contrast with a rather colorful and fruitful farm a little ways down—Karni Tzur. Karni Tzur is an Israeli settlement not far off from Beit Ummar.

**Analysis**

Clearly, one of the main reasons for the water shortage in the West Bank is due to discriminatory policies with the help of the Oslo Accords. In the first case study, we saw that not only can Palestinians living near the Jordan Valley not have their own wells, but they must lease land back from settlers to survive. However, the fact of the matter is that Palestinians can construct new wells, but Israel forbids them from doing so unless they obtain a permit. Yet, these permits are extremely difficult to obtain.

Likewise, in the second case study, it was discussed that a once green land is now dry, while an Israeli farm a little further off is not suffering as the Palestinian farm is. There is a very clear and disturbing discrimination of water allocation that is happening, while Israel continues to physically control Palestinians, not allowing them to become self-sustaining.

This politically-charged water shortage is not only affecting the health of the Palestinians, since they also consume an unsatisfactory amount of water per day, but their well-being in general is being negatively affected. Therefore, Israel must come to terms with the UN General Assembly recognizing the right to safe and clean drinking water as a human right and the UN Human Rights Council affirming that the human right to safe and clean drinking water is derived from an adequate standard of living, which Israel signed to. In order to do this, the discriminatory nature of the Oslo Accords need to be disbanded in order to ensure that equal amounts of water are being allotted to both the Palestinians and Israelis, with neither entity having complete control over the water resources.

In turn, this will finally allow the Palestinians to not only have equal access to the naturally rich Jordan Valley and the mountain aquifer, but Palestinians will also be able to

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complete their water drilling projects and reconstruct the wells that have been destroyed throughout this discriminatory process.

### **Conclusion**

A fair allocation of water is very much possible. Once water, a natural resource that all human beings have a right to, is equally distributed among both Palestinians and Israelis, the first step towards a *fair* peace process will have taken place. Until that happens, standing up against the injustices that are occurring in relation to this politically charged discriminatory water allocation needs to happen, and the reporting of such injustices need to be continued. Having access to water is a human right. No political entity should have the power to deprive any person of their human right.

### References

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