

Connection to Water of Palestinian Villages in Area C

In Area C of the West Bank which is under Israeli control, there are hundreds of Palestinian villages and communities, and among them are some 60 shepherding communities that have no connection to water. Most of these communities have been in the same location for several decades, but they are not recognized by the State of Israel and therefore are prevented from receiving access to water.

In these communities more than 10,000 residents live with a daily lack of water which affects every aspect of their lives, especially their health and economic wellbeing. Water is needed for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and washing as well as to tend to the flocks that they raise and that are their livelihood.

Without a water connection, the communities are forced to bring water from distant places by means of canisters or by purchasing from local merchants who bring the water in tanks with high costs that only increase with the amount of water and the distance which can be dozens of kilometers. The price can reach as much as 50 NIS per cubic meter while on average, the price of water brought by a tank in this manner is 20-40 NIS per cubic meter - compared to about 5 NIS per cubic meter for those connected to the water system (exclusive of sewage toll).

The expense of water for these communities can be as much as 30 percent of a family's income while an Israeli family will usually pay 2 percent of their monthly income for water.

“As the saying goes, and as is the truest of truths, there is no life without water, we’re dying a slow death, us, our flock, and our work. There’s no way for us to properly clean ourselves or our dishes, we drink polluted water. We’re being killed economically and physically.”

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the minimum amount of water necessary per person is about 100 liters of water per day but in these communities, the daily consumption is much lower and can be as little as just a few dozen liters per day. Additionally, the quality of the water is quite poor, and in instances of dire need, the residents sometimes use polluted water. Consumption of polluted water can cause numerous diseases, especially in children, and can even be deadly.

Israeli state policies prevent these communities even from gathering rainwater; when they build water cisterns, they face threats of demolition and in many cases, the cisterns are demolished or blocked up by the army. Israeli planning policies do not allow the construction or repairing of water cisterns without a permit and they do not provide permits to these communities. In a number of cases, main water pipes pass within meters of homes of the community, but they are not permitted to be connected even though it would be incredibly easy to do so.

International Humanitarian Law rules access to water to be a basic, protected right, because it is foundational to many other basic rights and needs. It falls on the occupying power (Israel) to fulfill this right and to prohibit any activities that prevent access to water. Even the Israeli High Court recognizes the right to water as a basic human right.

“When settlers establish a new settlement, they get connection to water and infrastructure within 24 hours and we’ve been here much longer than them but get no water. How can this be?”

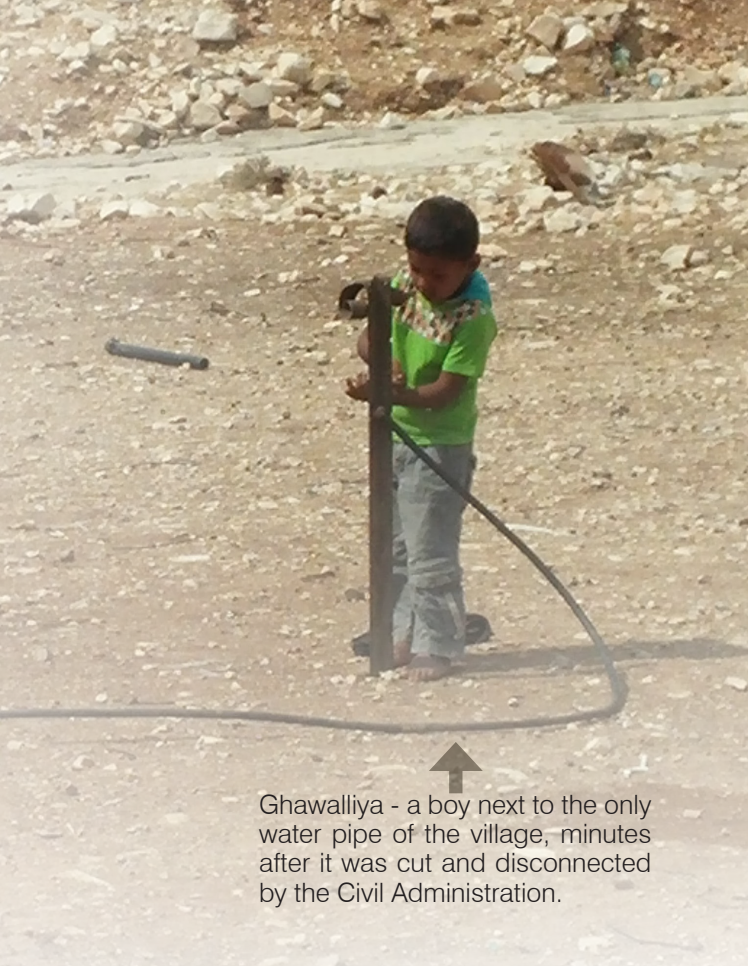
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Makhul village - the water pipe of the “Mekorot” water company (center) passes under the homes of the community. Despite this, the residents have no possibility of being connected to the pipe or of receiving clean water.

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In the area of Hasham A Darj, the shepherding community of Hathleen - an old water well that was destroyed and blocked by the Civil Administration which claims that it has no permit

At the beginning of 2021, Bimkom and the Association for Civil Rights appealed to the Ministry of Defense demanding to connect roughly 14 communities to water in consideration of their dire circumstances, with emphasis on the universal right to water and the humanitarian demand to ease the distress of the communities. Additionally, each appeal was accompanied by a map showing the best solution for connecting the community to water based on the existing water pipes nearby.

The State replied to some of the appeals by passing the responsibility of supplying water for the residents onto the Palestinian Authority as per the Oslo Accords,, noting that the homes are illegal (under Israel's interpretation of the law) and stating that the cases should be referred to the Joint Water Committee. In rejecting the requests, it was stated that the Israeli Civil Administration - through the Mekorot water company - has set up water-collection points out of a desire to provide a humanitarian response for the population which is without an organized water infrastructure.

The organizations aspire to continue to work towards a permanent and protected solution for water for the communities and demand increased efforts by the authorities to provide a true humanitarian response to these communities.



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Ghawalliya - a boy next to the only water pipe of the village, minutes after it was cut and disconnected by the Civil Administration.



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Masafer Yatta - The water system, including a solar-powered pump to bring water from the well, after it was demolished by the Civil Administration.