

ISRAEL-OPT: Dry Water Holes Versus Green Gardens

SOUTH MOUNT HEBRON/TEL AVIV, 27 October 2009 (IRIN) - It's a hot September day in the desert hills of South Mount Hebron in the West Bank, an hour's drive south of Jerusalem. A small convoy of four water tankers makes its way along an unpaved road to deliver water - purchased by a group of Israeli and Palestinian NGOs - to Bedouin Palestinians living in small communities in the hills.

Severe drought has left traditional water holes dry or depleted, and the absence of any water infrastructure means the local Bedouin/Palestinian villagers consume extremely small quantities of water - some 15 litres per person per day, according to activists, Bedouins and provisional Israeli government data, compared to 240-280 litres per person per day in Israel, according to the Israeli water authority in 2008.

Water from local Palestinian suppliers in the nearby Palestinian towns of Yata and Hebron can cost 50 NIS (US\$13) per cubic metre. A herd of 100 sheep drinks up to 1.5 cubic metres a day, forcing villagers to pay thousands of NIS in the dry months to keep them alive. Sheep and goats are the lifeblood of the Bedouin community.

Regular showers, laundry washing and running water in toilets are non-existent, local Bedouin told IRIN.

Yaacov Manor, a volunteer accompanying the water convoy on 26 September, told IRIN: "The villagers collect rainwater, but it is only enough for a short period of time. In recent years there has not been sufficient rain and they have been forced to buy water from local water vendors. By contrast, the [Israeli] Carmel settlement, which is in the area, receives water regularly, and even has gardens."

The Israeli Civil Administration said in response: "In general, the Palestinian water authority is responsible for supplying water to Palestinian residents. Nonetheless, the Civil Administration has opened a water filling spot in the Carmel area, where water has been transferred from the [Carmel] community for Palestinian use for many months now."

Other Palestinians not Faring Much Better

While the water situation for this particular Bedouin community is extremely tough, Palestinians elsewhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) do not fare much better.

According to a 27 October 2009 [report](#) by Amnesty International (AI), Israelis consume more than four times as much water per capita as Palestinians.

AI accused Israel of depriving Palestinians of access to adequate water, saying that by maintaining total control over the shared water resources and pursuing discriminatory policies Israel is violating the rights of the Palestinian population to water.

"Israel allows the Palestinians access to only a fraction of the shared water resources which lie mostly in the occupied West Bank, while unlawful Israeli settlements receive virtually unlimited supplies," Donatella Rovera, AI's researcher on Israel and OPT, told IRIN.

While Palestinian daily water consumption barely reaches 70 litres a day per person, Israeli daily consumption is more than 300 litres per day - more than four times as much, according to AI. In some rural communities Palestinians survive on barely 20 litres per day, the minimum amount recommended for domestic use in emergency situations. Some 180,000-200,000 Palestinians living in rural communities have no access to running water and the Israeli army often prevents them from even collecting rainwater, AI said.

The Israel Water authority said the report "distorts the truth" and that Israel "holds up its end of the Oslo agreement regarding water sharing".

Uzi Landau, Israel's minister of national infrastructure, called the report "a lie" and said it reflected Palestinian propaganda. "Despite Israel's severe water crisis, Israel transfers large quantities of water, greater than it is obliged to according to the [Oslo] agreement."

The Palestinian water authority was not available for comment.