

Water Scarcity Task Force Workshop

Key Talking Points

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Your Excellency, Dr. Shaddad Attili, Minister, Palestinian Water Authority,

Your Excellency, Mr Ismail Dueik, Minister of Agriculture

Dear Colleagues from the UN

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you today and it is heart-warming to address water related issues. You may, perhaps, not be aware that I started my career as Water Engineer, and this is one of the reasons why water, sanitation and hygiene programmes are close to my heart.

We all agree that the availability, access and affordability of adequate, safe water for drinking, domestic and other purposes is a fundamental human right, which is unfortunately absent in oPt. Water scarcity has been a chronic problem in the West Bank, limiting the individual's consumption of water to levels much below the World Health Organization recommendations.

The impact of the limited rainfall over last few years, the lower water tables coupled with already disproportionate water allocation, has made life extremely difficult for vulnerable populations in the southern part of the West Bank.

Despite the near average rainfall this year, reports have indicated that the aquifers are still under-replenished. The reasons are not only hydro-geological or meteorological but also, geo-political. Delays in implementation of the filling points and wells, due to non-approvals and pending approvals from the Israeli Civil Administration, have exacerbated the existing problem.

According to the estimates of WASH Cluster based on WASH Monitoring Programme (WASH MP) - 2009 carried out jointly by UNICEF and the Palestinian Hydrology Group, and other assessments by other partners. There are more than 43,000 people residing in 129 communities in the West Bank including Area C, who have access to less than 30 litres per person per day of water for domestic usage. Residents are not only receiving less than 30 litres of water per day per person, they are paying more than 20 Sheqels for a cubic meter of tankered water, which is almost six folds the average price of tinkered water. This puts more than 8,400 people in the West Bank at risk of relocation, 90 per cent of them are in Area C.

Humanitarian agencies have actually taken the lead in providing immediate assistance through the provision of water tankering services to communities in the southern part of the West Bank. The Palestinian Water Authority is also putting commendable efforts in tackling the water scarcity in Hebron Governorate by controlling infringements, illegal connections and improper distribution and management of water.

Water challenges can be effectively addressed with the right policies and priorities, and with the will, many countries in arid climates are managing water resources effectively. In the process, they are delivering tangible results for their people, encouraging sustainable economic development, and promoting stability across their countries.

We need to ensure that the basic survival rights and needs of these communities are met. Therefore, we should work collectively to ensure that integrated efforts are in place to reduce the recurrent risk of water scarcity.

Four key strategies are necessary to mitigate the risks of water scarcity:

First: There should be a linkage between humanitarian agencies' emergency relief interventions and the Palestinian Authority longer term development initiatives;

Second: Consolidated efforts by all agencies that aim at strengthening the resilience of these communities;

Third: All interventions should ensure community participation at planning, implementation and monitoring stages of programmes; and

Fourth: Advocacy efforts that are evidence based and synchronised with project implementation plans.

I am pleased to inform you that the Water Scarcity Task Force has drafted a framework that takes these four strategies into consideration, focusing on risk management approaches for mitigating the adverse impact of water scarcity.

I would like to seize this opportunity to urge the Palestinian Authority to endorse these strategies through its adoption, regularisation, and development of operational guidelines for the humanitarian response to address the needs of these vulnerable communities. Water should continue to be a front-burner issue, a high priority in Palestinian national plans in order to give Palestinian children the future they deserve.

Finally – and foremost – I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of you for your rigorous participation, your strong team work, and your long term commitment to this process. In particular, I would like to thank the Palestinian Authority Ministries and organisations for their commitment and hard work in support of vulnerable communities and to all international and local institutions working to mitigate the adverse impact of water scarcity. UNICEF will continue working together with you to identify how best to provide support for children and their families across oPt. UNICEF is committed to carrying this work forward.

I would like to end by sharing with you a personal case study in Latin America.