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Jewish settlers get '20 times' more water than Palestinians

Israel squeezing Palestinian water supply: Amnesty

** Water tankers forced to take detours as roads closed to Palestinian traffic*

JERUSALEM: Amnesty International on Tuesday accused Israel of denying Palestinians adequate access to water while allowing Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank almost unlimited supplies.

Israel, the human rights group said, restricts availability of water in the Palestinian territories "by maintaining total control over the shared resources and pursuing discriminatory policies." "Israel allows the Palestinians access to only a fraction of the shared water resources, which lie mostly in the occupied West Bank while the unlawful Israeli settlements there receive virtually unlimited supplies," Amnesty researcher Donatella Rovera said in a report.

Israel consumes four times more water than Palestinians, who use an average of 70 litres a day per person, according to the report entitled: "Troubled waters - Palestinians denied fair access to water." Amnesty said the "inequality" is even more pronounced in some areas of the West Bank where settlements use up to 20 times more water per capita than neighbouring Palestinian communities which survive on barely 20 litres of water per capita a day. "Swimming pools, well-watered lawns and large irrigated farms in Israeli settlements in the OPT (occupied Palestinian territory) stand in stark contrast next to Palestinian villages whose inhabitants struggle even to meet their domestic water needs." The Israeli foreign ministry responded to a similar report by the World Bank in April, saying Israel shares water resources with Palestinians in a fair manner. The ministry said that Palestinians have access to twice as much water as the 23.6 million cubic metres (833 million cubic feet) they are allocated annually under an agreement with Israel.

Tankers: The Amnesty report pointed out that Palestinians are not allowed to drill new wells or rehabilitate old ones without permits from the Israeli authorities, which are often impossible to get. In addition, many roads in the West Bank are closed or restricted to Palestinian traffic, which forces water tankers to make long detours to supply communities not connected to the water network.

The report said between 180,000 and 200,000 Palestinians in West Bank rural communities have no access to running water, while taps in other areas often run dry. In the Gaza Strip, the 22-day military offensive Israel launched on December 27 damaged water reservoirs, wells, sewage networks and pumping stations. "The coastal aquifer, Gaza's sole fresh water resource, is polluted by the infiltration of raw sewage from cesspits and sewage collection ponds and by the infiltration of sea water (itself also contaminated by raw sewage discharged daily into the sea near the coast) and has been degraded by over-extraction," Amnesty said. afp

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