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Report: Palestinians denied water

Israel is denying Palestinians access to even the basic minimum of clean, safe water, Amnesty International says.

In a report, the human rights group says Israeli water restrictions discriminate against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.



Some Palestinians only get 20 litres of water a day, Amnesty says

It says that in Gaza, Israel's blockade has pushed the already ailing water and sewage system to "crisis point".

Israel says the report is flawed and the Palestinians get more water than was agreed under the 1990s peace deal.

'Basic need'

In the 112-page report, Amnesty says that on average Palestinian daily water consumption reaches 70 litres a day, compared with 300 litres for the Israelis.

It says that some Palestinians barely get 20 litres a day - the minimum recommended even in humanitarian emergencies.

While Israeli settlers in the West Bank enjoy lush gardens and swimming pools, Amnesty describes a series of Israeli measures it says are discriminating against Palestinians:

- Israel has "entirely appropriated the Palestinians' share of the Jordan river" and uses 80% of a key shared aquifer
- West Bank Palestinians are not allowed to drill wells without Israeli permits, which are "often impossible" to obtain
- Rainwater harvesting cisterns are "often destroyed by the Israeli army"
- Israeli soldiers confiscated a water tanker from villagers who were trying to remain in land Israel had declared a "closed military area"
 - An unnamed Israeli soldier says rooftop Palestinian household water tanks are "good for target practice"
 - Much of the land cut off by the West Bank barrier is land

“ Israel must end its discriminatory policies, immediately lift all the restrictions it imposes on Palestinians' access to water ”

Donatella Rovera
Amnesty International

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with good access to a major aquifer

- Israeli military operations have damaged Palestinian water infrastructure, including \$6m worth during the Cast Lead operation in Gaza last winter
- The Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza has "exacerbated what was already a dire situation" by denying many building materials needed for water and sewage projects.

The report also noted that the Palestinian water authorities have been criticised for bad management, quoting one audit that described the sector as in "total chaos".

"Water is a basic need and a right, but for many Palestinians obtaining even poor-quality, subsistence-level quantities of water has become a luxury that they can barely afford," Amnesty's Donatella Rovera said.

"Israel must end its discriminatory policies, immediately lift all the restrictions it imposes on Palestinians' access to water."

'Fair share'

Ms Rovera also urged Israel to "take responsibility for addressing the problems it created by allowing Palestinians a fair share of the shared water resources".

Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said "the idea that we're taking water away from someone else is simply preposterous".

He argued that Israeli fresh water use per capita had gone down since 1967 due to efficiency and new technologies, while the Palestinians' use had increased and more than a third of their water was wasted.

If there were allegations of military wrongdoing, those would be investigated, he said.

He also rejected the claim that Israel was preventing Palestinians from drilling for water, saying Israel had approved 82 such projects but the Palestinians had only implemented 26 of them.

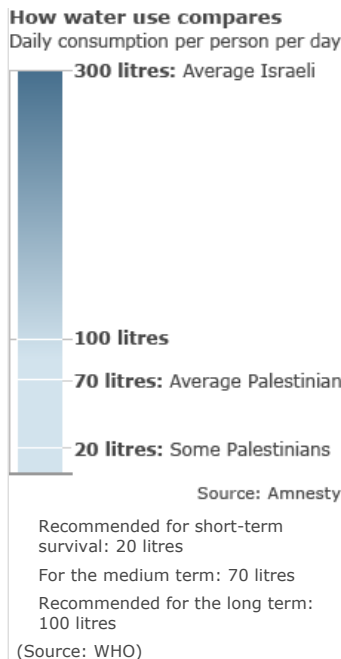
"They have received billions of dollars in international aid over the last decade and a half, why have they not invested that in their own water infrastructure?" he asked.

The report also criticised the Oslo Accords, which the Palestinians agreed to in 1993.

It said that under them, the Palestinians gained the responsibility for managing an "insufficient" water supply and maintaining "long neglected" water infrastructure.

Also, the deal left the Palestinians paying Israel for half of the domestic water used in the West Bank, despite the fact it is extracted from the shared aquifer.

Mr Regev said Israel provides the Palestinians with more water than it was required to under the accord.



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