

Palestinian Springs

A Water Source at Risk of Extinction



By Abeer Al Butmah

Springs in Palestine have remained the single largest water source for domestic consumption for Palestinians in areas not connected to pipelines and are a significant source for irrigation and for watering livestock. The springs' total discharge from the three West Bank aquifers is around 39 MCM, excluding the discharge of 100 MCM from the Dead Sea springs that are controlled by Israel.



Israeli settlers and soldiers preventing Palestinians from reaching and walking along the eco-touristic route.



A water spring in a natural rock in Aner area that is threatened by Israeli settlers. It is located 1.5 km south of Der Ammar.

Palestinians have increasingly lost access to water sources in the West Bank as a result of the control on springs by Israeli settlers, who have used fear, threats, and series of restrictions to ensure control of water sources close to the settlements. According to the UNHRC, "Settlements benefit from enough water to run farms and orchards, and for swimming pools and spas, while Palestinians often struggle to access the minimum water requirements."ⁱ

Israel continues to increase its control over the water sources in the Palestinian territories, thus increasing the suffering of Palestinians year after year. Deep Israeli wells are drying up Palestinian wells and springs. Israel not only uses military force to prevent Palestinians from drilling new wells, it also even demolishes rainwater-harvesting cisterns.ⁱⁱ A survey carried out by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 2012 identified 56 water springs that are close to Israeli settlements, the majority of them located in Area C – which represents more than 60 percent of the

West Bank where Israel retains control over security, planning, and building – and on land parcels recorded by the Israeli Civil Administration as privately owned by Palestinians.ⁱⁱⁱ

The restrictions and limitations imposed on Palestinian access to their own water springs and the development of their own resources have exacerbated the already severe water shortages within Palestinian communities, mainly of those that depend on the water springs as their main source of drinking and irrigation water. Many agricultural areas are affected by these settler practices, many farmers were forced either to cease cultivating their land or face a reduction in productivity or pay more costs for water tankers.^{iv}

The restrictions include threats to Palestinian access to their water springs and the building of fences to prevent them from reaching the area. Of the 56 springs near Israeli settlements, 30 are fully under Israeli control, and Palestinians are forbidden from accessing the area. The other 26 springs are threatened by Israeli settlers. They target these springs regularly



Israeli marker painted on the rock for the eco-touristic route in the area of Aner.



Israel's tourism department took over a Palestinian eco-tourism route and is giving it a Hebrew name.

and patrol them in order to prevent Palestinians from using them. Violence and destruction may also come directly from the occupation authorities. "Destruction of water infrastructure, including rainwater cisterns, by Israeli authorities has increased since the beginning of 2010; and doubled in 2012 compared to 2011."^v

Israel is developing the tourism infrastructure of Israeli settlements around Palestinian springs. In more than 70 percent of the springs, Israeli settlers have begun to develop the surrounding area into a "tourist attraction." Along with the elimination or reduction of Palestinian access to the water springs, Israeli settlers have begun to develop touristic areas surrounding the spring – constructing pools and parks with benches and tables, shade structures, and roads between the settlements and the springs. All the development of these tourist sites is being done with the support of the state budget.

In addition, Israeli settlers seize natural eco-touristic routes from Palestinians, such as in the case of Deir Ammar, where Israeli settlers have begun to

control a Palestinian eco-touristic route and seized all its natural components.^{vi} Another dangerous issue is granting Hebrew names to springs to add a symbolic dimension to the process of appropriation. While some of the names are simple transliterations of the original Arabic names (e.g., from Ein Al Dweer to Ein Dvir), in other cases, springs are named after individuals to be commemorated, usually founders of a nearby settlement, victims of Palestinian attacks, or soldiers killed in combat (e.g., from 'Ein Sijma to 'Ein Yitzhak).

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Article photos courtesy of the author.

ⁱ UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) report on the implications of Israeli settlements and their "creeping annexation" on Palestinian rights, January 31, 2013. Available at <http://www.map-uk.org/news/archive/post/32-israeli-settlements-blasted-in-un-report>.

ⁱⁱ Life Source, Water in Palestine, "Violations of the human right to water in Palestine," available at <http://www.lifesource.ps/english/water-in-palestine/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory, "The Humanitarian Impact of the Takeover of Palestinian Water Springs by Israeli Settlers," March 2012, available at https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_springs_factSheet_march_2012_english.pdf.

^{iv} For information on the cost of tankered water see water, sanitation and hygiene at OCHA's «Vulnerability Profile of Palestinian Communities in Area C», available at <http://data.ochaopt.org/vpp.aspx>.

^v Ayman Raby, "Water Apartheid: A crime against humanity?" *Ecologist*, March 22, 2014, available at http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2329259/water_apartheid_in_palestine_a_crime_against_humanity.html.

^{vi} As documented by people's testimonies through PENGON and staff visits of EQA.