Israel - Los Angeles Water Agreement

In June 2008, Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa visited Israel with a delegation of top municipal officials. Following the visit, Villaraigosa announced that the city of Los Angeles would engage in joint cooperation with Israel on water issues. This involves both working with Kinrot and Mekorot National Water Company.

The agreement:
- Provides Israeli companies with access to Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) facilities for pilot projects.
- Foresees the installation of Israeli technologies in the DWP facilities.
- Entails cooperation in water R&D ventures and academic studies, which will encompass the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).
- Includes the transfer of know how from Kinrot to the Los Angeles municipality on how to set up a water technology incubator.

Via this agreement, Los Angeles and its institutions legitimise, finance and profit from Israel’s experience of water management – the “world leader in water technology and conservation” – which is built upon a 60 year old policy of resource theft and deviation of water from Palestinian communities towards Jewish Israelis.

This policy is an essential part of the political project of the Israeli state, based on the dispossession of and discrimination against the Palestinian people for the benefit of Jewish citizens and Israeli colonization. In particular:
- Israel’s approach towards water discriminates against Palestinians living across historic Palestine.
- Main water sources located in the West Bank are under complete Israeli control. These sources are used for Israeli consumption while Palestinian communities face water shortages and cuts. Further, Palestinian communities are effectively prohibited from accessing and developing water facilities and infrastructure.
- Occupation forces have used water as a weapon, intentionally destroying water infrastructure across the West Bank and Gaza. Attacks on water are also part of the population transfer project that is being undertaken in certain areas along the Green Line, in the Jordan Valley and around Jerusalem.

Mekorot National Water Company

- Mekorot is a government owned corporation that is the national supplier for Israel. Mekorot also has control over the annexed water sources from the West Bank, supplying water to settlements and a sizeable number of Palestinian communities.
- Mekorot has applied a system of pricing whereby Palestinians are charged exorbitant rates while Israeli settlers occupying land in the West Bank enjoy a lower pricing scheme. Mekorot is effectively stealing Palestinian water and then re-selling it to the same communities.
- 76% of communities receiving water from Mekorot have reported a reduction in or, in some cases, a complete halt to their supply of water. These communities are forced to buy water, most likely from a Mekorot tap, at a much higher price.

The Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign calls upon the people of Los Angeles to unite in support of justice, human rights and the Palestinian struggle. We must ensure the agreements between Los Angeles municipality and its institutions, in particular UCLA facilities, become a target of awareness raising and concrete action to stop complicity with Israeli crimes. It is time to join the global movement of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) that has is coalescing around the Palestinian United Call for BDS against Israel, issued on 9 July 2005.

Water in Palestine

Israeli policies affect all Palestinians still residing in historic Palestine. Whether it involves the wholesale destruction witnessed in Gaza or the discrimination against the Palestinian communities living in '48 Palestine (Israel), Israeli policy is built upon the dispossession of and discrimination against the Palestinian people for the benefit of Jewish citizens and Israeli colonization.

'48 Palestine

Palestinians living in 39 so-called “unrecognized villages” are unconnected to the national water network and as such suffer from related problems in the areas of sanitation and health. A vast majority of these villages are home to Palestinian Bedouin living in the Naqab (Negev). Ironically, Israel prides itself about the massive water infrastructure built by Mekorot for the Jewish population in the Naqab.

Discriminatory water policies affect Palestinian communities connected to the water network as well. Mekorot employs a policy of cutting off water supplies of whole Arab towns as a means of collecting debts from local authorities, constituting blatant collective punishment.
Gaza

The Gaza Strip, which depends on the over-pumped Coastal Aquifer, suffers from particular Occupation policies that bar access to clean and sufficient water. For example, the damming of Wadi Gaza cuts Palestinians off from a possible water source and blocks the recharge of the Coastal Aquifer. More importantly, the general state of siege imposed on Gaza has destroyed the water-related infrastructure. To cite but one example, the city of Beit Hanoun was attacked a number of times in January and May of 2003. The main sewage and water networks were heavily damaged, with waste-water flowing into the streets. A number of residential buildings, in addition to agricultural areas, saw their flow of water cut off. The damage totalled at around $70,000 in a village where poverty made timely repairs to the network impossible.

The West Bank

Water in the West Bank comes from a variety of sources. The primary source for the West Bank is the Mountain Aquifer.

The aim of controlling the West Bank water has been a key Israeli project since the 1967 occupation. Israel has been very vocal that it considers the Mountain Aquifer a primary source of water, and as such control over this source, most of which is located in the West Bank, is a central concern. In general, water policies in the West Bank are discriminatory and aimed at perpetuating Occupation control of Palestinian resources.

The vast majority of Palestinian water sources are under total Israeli control. As such, Israeli authorities limit Palestinian water consumption, blocks the digging of new wells and prohibits Palestinians from using a number of key water sources. For example, although about 83% of the recharge from the Mountain Aquifer system main aquifer lies within the West Bank, Israel expropriates over 80% of the water. These sources are annexed, or set to be annexed, by the Apartheid Wall.

Palestinian water sources serve Jewish settlements built on stolen Palestinian land. While most Palestinians suffer from serious water shortages, especially in summer, Jewish settlers receive abundant supply of water. The same applies to Palestinian agriculture in the Jordan Valley; settlement-agribusinesses like Agrexco have ample access to Palestinian water while local farmers struggle to water their crops. It is estimated that settlers use 6 times as much per capita than Palestinians. In addition, main water network valves for Palestinian communities located near settlements are often located within the settlements themselves. This leads to further water shortages, as settlers are able to cut off water to local Palestinian communities near settlements.

A History of Water Annexation

1967: Military orders are issued that initiate Israeli control over Palestinian water supplies:
1. Israel defines “absentee property” as lands whose owners were either unknown or fled in 1967, leading to the confiscation of an unknown number of Palestinian wells.
2. Israel also takes authority over water resources from municipalities, governors and village councils and transfers it to area military commanders.
3. Palestinians are prohibited developing new water infrastructure without an Israeli permit. From 1967 – 2005 only 23 permits for new wells were granted.
4. Israel takes total control over surface water from the Jordan River basin, located on the eastern border of the West Bank. Palestinians have been banned from accessing this water source since 1967.

1967 – 1969: Five groups of Palestinian springs are expropriated and declared as “Nature Reserves” for exclusive use by Israeli citizens. Valuable irrigated farming lands along the Jordan River valley are declared “closed military areas.”

1975: Israel imposes pumping quotas on Palestinian wells, enforcing the mandate with strict fines for pumping in excess of these amounts. In 1986, a 10% reduction in the pumping quota is imposed.

1995: Oslo II perpetuates the measures of Israeli control over Palestinian resources by failing to define the right to water and moving this issue to “final status negotiations” that have not yet taken place. A Joint Water Committee is set up, yet this fails to address the Israeli power imbalance over resources or mining of water by Israel. The Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) is established to regulate and maintain responsibility over water resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, though because Israel maintains control over flow and volume of water supply, PWA essentially becomes a scapegoat for the water shortage caused by Israeli Occupation.

2002: Israeli authorities publicly ban Palestinians from drilling for water and a freeze is placed on the existing permit application system for new wells.

Water in the Context of Forced Population Transfer

Since its inception, Israel has engaged in a campaign of forcible population transfer. This involves the ethnic cleansing of selected areas through both direct and “silent” transfer with the aim of taking control of vital Palestinian resources. Silent expulsion refers to the practice of making daily life impossible and thus prompting residents to leave their homes. This is carried out through withholding building permits, limiting employment and educational opportunities, cutting of basic services and barring the movement of people, goods and services. More often than not, expulsions are followed with the expansions of nearby settlements, a development which is especially acute in Jerusalem.

Smaller Palestinian population groups along the Green Line, around Jerusalem and in the Jordan Valley are currently the most threatened by this tactic. Occupation forces often target water resources, in tandem with other oppressive measures, to pressure threatened Palestinian communities.

A demolished water tank in the Jordan Valley. Occupation forces often destroy and confiscate water infrastructure in an effort to force Palestinians off the land. Many Palestinian farmers in the Valley are not connected to the central water network, making these attacks especially deleterious.
A farmer in al-Hadidiya in the Jordan Valley stands with village water tanks. The Occupation has repeatedly demolished homes, confiscated and destroyed water tanks and stolen animals in an attempt to force people of thier land.

Many of the small villages along the Wall are at risk of displacement, threatened by the land confiscations and cut off by the Wall and encroaching settlements from the rest of the West Bank. These villages also suffer from chronic water shortages, which the Occupation has exploited. In May 2008, to take one example, Occupation forces issued a demolition orders to the municipality of al-Khader, in the Bethlehem district, targeting the village water tank. This tank, which was constructed in February 2007 to alleviate the chronic water shortages, serves a number of schools (2,500 total students) as well as 30 families in the old city.

The Occupation has de facto annexed Jerusalem through a series of measures, including the construction of a settlement “envelope” around the city. The creation of the settlements has necessitated the expulsion of a number of communities living in the area. The Jahalin Bedouin have been one of the hardest hit. Occupation forces have historically exploited water resources as weapons against the Jahalin, systematically closing water wells to shepherds and their flocks and annexing springs. The largest annexation was that of Um Rassas, where seven water wells were located and used for the Ma’ale Adumin settlement.

In 1997, Occupation forces attempted to expel 200 Jahalin from the Sray’a family living in Wadi Abu Hindi, near the Qedar settlement. After literally destroying the community, Occupation forces confiscated water tanks in an effort to force the people to leave. In their fight to stay on their land, residents held out for two weeks without basic services, including adequate water. It was impossible to transfer large amounts of water into the area, as soldiers would confiscate the tanks.

In the Jordan Valley, Occupation forces have targeted a number of small communities for transfer. The most well-known are al-Hadidiya and ‘Aqaba. In this area, which is barred by the Occupation from direct connection to the main water network, Occupation forces target water infrastructure. Across the Valley, communities report that wells and water tanks are intentionally damaged and confiscated, with soldiers often confiscating material to prevent their rebuilding or repair.

**Environmental Effects**

- Far from being innovative and environmentally conscious, Israeli water policies are extremely destructive on local communities and environments.
- Closure policies, the permit system and the destruction of infrastructure have forced many smaller Palestinian communities to seek alternative water sources. These sources are rarely of adequate quality and are often contaminated, leading to health problems. Israeli attacks and policies have both damaged and prevented the upkeep and repair waste disposal programs, leading to the pollution of water sources and health problems.
- **Israeli deep wells:** There are 42 deep wells in the West Bank that were dug since 1967 and are used almost exclusively by Israel for the supply of water to Israeli settlements. Israeli drilling of deep wells has a direct effect on other Palestinian water sources. For example, in the northern Jordan Valley, 8 wells and 11 springs (vital for the agriculture of Palestinians in the area) were completely dried up as a result of Israeli drilling in the area.
- **Settlements:** Waste from settlements, which are built in elevate areas, often flows down to the surrounding Palestinian communities. This damages water supplies and affects agriculture.
- **Jordan River Basin:** This water source, which has been off-limits to Palestinians since 1967, has been affected by Israeli over-use, leading to depletion and deterioration of its water quality.

Palestinian water infrastructure is often in terrible condition on account of Israeli attacks and restrictions. This problem is especially pronounced in Palestinian communities located in Area C.

**Get Involved**

For additional material on the Wall in Palestine and information on how to get involved in the Palestinian BDS Campaign, contact: global@stopthewall.org

For detailed information on the water situation in Palestine, see the Palestinian Hydrology Group’s “Water for Life Campaign” at: http://www.phg.org/wash%2Dmp/