

October 4, 2021

To:

Ms. Sarah Muscroft, Head of Office for UN OCHA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Mr. Renato ZERBINI RIBEIRO LEÃO, Chair of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Mr. Sven Koopmans as the EU's Special Representative (EUSR) for the Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Tor Wennesland, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

Mrs Lynn Hastings Deputy of Tor Wennesland and United Nations Resident Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Mr. John Clarke, Head of Office of the Quartet

Israel's policy to deny Palestinians' access to water in Area C

We, the undersigned global coalition of human rights organizations and people of conscience around the world, ask you to act decisively to put an end to the State of Israel's illegal and immoral policy that prevents access to water by the Palestinian communities living in Area C in the West Bank.

While many communities around the world are suffering from water shortages due to the climate crisis, in Area C in the West Bank, indigenous communities are suffering from water shortages due to policies of the Israeli government.

The State of Israel has controlled all the natural resources in the West Bank since 1967. It uses these resources to exert control over the Palestinian people, and to promote Israeli settlements and demographic changes in the region, in violation of its obligations according to international law and a long list of UN Security Council Resolutions (242 (1967), 338 (1973), 446 (1979), 452 (1979), 465 (1980), 476 (1980), 478 (1980), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), and 1850 (2008), 2334 (2016).

Water is one of the most important resources for human life. Access to water is recognized as part of the rights for life, health and human dignity that are enshrined in the international conventions to which Israel is a signatory, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), and the instructions appended to the Hague Convention Regarding the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex (1907).

Nonetheless, the State of Israel is violating its international obligations, and denying basic human rights from the local Palestinian communities in area C, by preventing their access to water.

While the World Health Organization recommends 100 liters per day per person for personal and domestic use, according to [B'Tselem](#) Palestinian consumption per person in the West Bank is less than 90 liters per day per person, and in Area C it even drops to 20 liters per day. By contrast, an average Israeli consumes approximately 300 liters of water a day.

According to [Amnesty International](#), in November 1967 the Israeli authorities issued Military Order 158, which stated that Palestinians could not construct any new water installation without first

obtaining a permit from the Israeli army. Since then, the extraction of water from any new source or the development of any new water infrastructure has required permits from Israel, which have been nearly impossible to obtain.

According to [Al-Haq](#), as part of the Oslo agreements, the State of Israel signed an agreement with the Palestinian Authority regarding the distribution of water and the establishing of a joint water committee. Since its inception, this agreement has discriminated against the Palestinian population, and the joint water committee has always been dysfunctional. Almost 20 years later, the agreements have no relevance to the reality on the ground: dozens of new Israeli settlements and outposts have been established, while the settlers and the State of Israel continue plundering the natural resources of the West Bank, without regard to the needs of the local Palestinian communities.

The situation is most dire for farmers and shepherds in dozens of Palestinian localities in the south Hebron Hills and the Jordan Valley. The Israeli Military Commander of the West Bank does not allow these villages to be connected to the running water grid, nor are they permitted to collect rainwater (which is “legally” owned by the State). Therefore, these Palestinian communities are forced to buy water in the private market year-round and to transport it with expensive water tanks. Delivery costs to these localities are particularly high due to poor access, since Palestinians are not permitted to build new roads or to pave the old ones. In order to make the lives of these communities more miserable, the Military Commander ordered a policy of confiscating water tanks and also of vehicles transporting water to the communities. This means that the communities are required to pay a high price for the water itself, for the transportation of water, and for the fines required to be paid to the Army in order to release the water tanks and the vehicles. In this way many families become entrapped in a vicious circle of debts and loans.

According to [UN OCHA oPt](#), the escalating cost of water in Area C under these conditions is up to eight times the average price of water for Palestinians in other parts of the West Bank. In many cases water that is delivered is unsafe to drink due to poor sanitation conditions in the tankers, and families have to choose between their own water needs and the water needs of their herds and agricultural crops.

In addition to imposing severe restrictions on the development of water infrastructure in these localities, Israeli authorities have taken control of the natural water sources that the local communities relied on for years. Settlers have taken control over natural springs that have been used by Palestinian communities for generations, turning them into tourist and baptismal sites, to which Palestinians' access is denied. In addition, cisterns and wells have been destroyed by both the Army and settlers, and Palestinians' access has been blocked.

The water problem exemplifies the State of Israel's apartheid policy in the West Bank. The Military Commander of the West Bank justifies these practices by saying that the Palestinian communities in Area C did not receive building permits; however, the Israeli government's own policy does not allow Palestinians to obtain building permits in this area. At the same time, all the Israeli outposts and settlers who live in buildings without legal permits are allowed to connect to the water grid.

This state of affairs is emblematic of Israel's approach to West Bank natural resources generally, as its exclusive property and as a tool to advance the ethnic cleansing of the local Palestinian

population in Area C. A constant shortage of water together with the daily violence of the Army and the settlers, as well as the settlers' takeover of the grazing and agricultural areas, prevents many communities, especially in the southern Hebron Hills and the Jordan Valley, from developing economic resilience, thus intensifying poverty and despair.

This racist, illegal and immoral policy must be stopped. The State of Israel should not be allowed to advance its racist and colonialist agenda at the expense of the minimal human existence of the residents of the Palestinian communities in Area C. Access to water is a basic human right, even when the human in question is Palestinian.

Sincerely,

Combatants for Peace,

And the following joining organizations:

American Friends of Combatants for Peace

Anti-violence mothers

Association Switzerland-Palestine

BDS Brasil

Boycott from Within (Israeli citizens for BDS)

Forum for Human Rights in Israel / Palestine

Green party of St Louis

Haqel: In Defense of Human Rights

Ir Amim

Jahalin Solidarity

Jewish Liberation Theology Institute

Jewish Voice for Democracy and Justice in Israel/Palestine

Jordan Valley coalition

MachsomWatch: Women against the Occupation and for Human Rights

Non Violence Communication

Olive Harvest Coalition For Palestinians agricultural rights

Other Voice

Our Heritage - the Charter for Democracy

Peace Watch Switzerland

Rebuilding Alliance

Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom

Social Television

Ta'ayush

Temple Hillel B'nai Torah

The Jordan Valley Coalition

Torat Tzedek - Torah of Justice

Veterans For Peace Santa Fe Chapter

Water Coalition For Palestinians water rights

Yesh Din - Volunteers for Human Rights

And the following joining individuals:

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