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Severe water shortage in West Bank; some homes without water for weeks

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Bethlehem – Ma'an – A coalition of Palestinian and international NGOs issued a statement on Friday calling the water shortage across the West Bank a "humanitarian crisis" and said they were "gravely concerned."

The coalition said that there was a reduction in water supplies from rainfall averaging 45% across the West Bank, which has left 200 communities not served by the municipal water sources at a loss. There is not enough water for cooking, cleaning, agricultural irrigation, or basic food-producing plant watering.



Filling storage containers at local wells
[Ma'anImages]

Even in cities and villages connected to water mains, reduction in supply means frequent cut offs for homes and offices. It is common in many areas to not have water for a week, and others only receive water once in a fortnight.

Several aid organizations have been providing emergency water resources so the basic needs to Palestinians can be met. The coalition, however, said it doubted whether even with the emergency support, that all basic needs would be met. The group said that unless Israel increases the current water supply to the area, health and hygiene, crops and fruit trees would suffer.

When wells dry up or water mains stay shut for long periods of time, homes and businesses regularly turn to water tanker services to fill the gaps in service. Most buildings have several water canisters on their roofs, used to store water when lines are full. The tanks are filled up by water tanker services, but cost 30-40% more than the municipal service.

For one tank of water (10 square meters), residents pay around 250 shekels, which will provide water for five homes, which lasts a family anywhere from 2-6 days.

Even when families can buy water, tankers often have to travel long distances to wells or "filling points." Many of these are obstructed by Israeli military checkpoints, or physical obstacles like mounds of earth piled onto roads near the wells, or concrete blocks placed by the Israeli army to prevent traffic on a given route.

As a result, tankers have to travel circuitous routes to get to the wells, using more gas and time, and ultimately costing the customer more.

Many West Bankers spend between 3-5% of their monthly income on water, and more when families depend on crops and livestock for their livelihoods.

The coalition of organizations now providing emergency service, say that approximately 10% of West Bank communities are surviving on less than ten liters of water per person per day. This figure is well below the World Health Organization estimate of what average water usage should be for proper health and hygiene to be maintained, which is 50-100 liters per person per day.

According to the water coalition, "lack of economic and physical access to safe water is increasingly leading poor families to consume water from unprotected sources, such as agricultural wells, posing serious concerns about water quality and potential public health effects. The current water shortage is also increasing the levels of food insecurity among rural communities, herders in particular, raising the risk of



displacement.”

The organizations in the coalition issued a call for the international community to respond with funds and aid for immediate relief, and the long term building of more wells and filling points for communities off the municipal grids. The group also called on Israel to issue permits for the construction of such wells, and immediately increase the amount of water West Bankers have access too. Finally, they called on the Israeli and Palestinian governments to come to an equitable decision on the sharing of water resources so that catastrophe and humanitarian crises can be avoided in the future.

The participating organizations are: PARC - Agricultural Development Association, PREMIERE URGENGE, G.V.C - Gruppo di Volontariato Civile, LifeSource, Palestinian Hydrology Group, Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction, The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem, The Swedish Cooperative Centre, Palestine Farmer Union, Oxfam International, and Asamblea de Cooperacion Por la Paz.



Gruppo di Volontariato Civile

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