

AUSTRALIANS FOR PALESTINE

PO Box 2099
Hawthorn VIC 3122
Melbourne - Australia
Tel: 03 9818 5080
Fax: 03 9818 5009

info@australiansforpalestine.com
www.australiansforpalestine.com

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The Jordan Valley

Providing a Voice

Background

Since 1967 the Jordan Valley has been under Israeli military occupation and has become off-limits to all but the 65,000 Palestinians living in 29 communities, while Palestinians from other parts of the occupied territories are for the most part refused entry.

A further 15,000 Palestinians live in dozens of small Bedouin communities, most of them without infrastructure or permanent structures and at the mercy of the Israeli occupation forces who seek to evict them. Entire populations of al-Himma, as-Sakut, Deir, al Qa'un, Ein as Sultan and the camp Abu al-Jaq were expelled and Palestinians lost their agricultural lands and the right to access most of the Jordan Valley.

Today Palestinians have access to only 3-4% of the Jordan Valley - historically the most important Palestinian agricultural region. Around 650 square kms of fertile lands parallel to the River Jordan have been confiscated, severely impacting on Palestinian livelihood from agriculture. Fifty percent of the Jordan Valley (1200 km²) is now controlled by illegal settlements and a further 46% is a closed military zone.

Today 9,400 settlers inhabit 37 colonies in the Jordan Valley - all of which are illegal under the Geneva Convention. Israel extensively exploits the Jordan Valley, notably the water, and other resources and severely limits Palestinian access demonstrating its intention of de facto annexation.

Destruction of the Palestinian agricultural economy

The land confiscations, the lack of access to all but 3-4% of the Jordan Valley and the severe restrictions of movement of goods and people through checkpoints and closures has resulted in the systematic destruction of the Palestinian agricultural economy.

There is an imposed shortage of water, fertilizers and infrastructure and markets for produce are systematically cut off by a series of checkpoints, leaving produce to rot. In contrast state-subsidised settlement products reach Palestinian markets without delay.

Water Control

Israeli government policies that have created extreme water shortages seriously impacting on the Palestinian population:

- **Palestinians have been barred from their share of the Jordan River's water (250 million m³ per year), while excessive amounts are extracted for the profit of settlements.**
- **Palestinians are prohibited from digging wells or maintaining existing ones and the Israeli state water company Mekarot, sells water (a stolen Palestinian resource) back to the Palestinians at inflated prices while settlers receive huge state water subsidies.**
- **Siting of new settler-only wells near Palestinian springs, so Palestinian wells further away will dry up.**
- **Most water-rich Palestinian wells are located in forbidden areas of closed military zones.**
- **Thousands were deprived of their livelihoods because 162 agricultural water projects developed during the pre-1967 Jordanian rule were made inaccessible to Palestinians because of the closed military areas.**

Housing restrictions and demolitions

While the international community ignores the continued building of illegal settlements, Palestinians have been prohibited from all new building and restructuring. Countless homes have been demolished including amenities such as: schools, public toilets, water tanks and electricity pylons, leaving communities without water and power and attempts to generate power through solar panels have been thwarted. The majority of Palestinians in the Jordan Valley now live in abject poverty in tents or shacks made from salvaged materials.

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Checkpoints, pass laws and settlements

The Israeli stranglehold on Palestinian movement is maintained through a complex system of checkpoints, roadblocks, resident ID's, worker permits and strategically placed illegal settlements that serve to control roads and access points.

Settlement exploitation of labour and stolen lands

Each new settler receives 75% discount for drinking water, electricity, telecommunications and transportation as well as free irrigation water and free education along with 70 dunums of stolen Palestinian land and 1000 shekels from the Israeli state when they move to the Jordan Valley. They also cultivate large portions of land inside 'closed military zones' and behind the annexation fence along the Jordan River closed off to Palestinians.

Israeli state-owned agricultural companies also harvest crops grown on the stolen Palestinian lands and exploit the local Palestinian population. Because of the impoverishment of the Palestinians hundreds now work on the illegal settlements in the Jordan Valley being allowed access by showing permits from their employers. In contrast, permits to work on Palestinian farms are only given to its owners, not workers.

Exploitation of workers engaged in harvesting include violating health and safety regulations, such as: not being provided with protective equipment against pesticides, lack of safety harnesses or cranes in date picking and being compelled to remain all day in tree tops without safety devices to prevent falls.

Because of the Israeli control of movement through checkpoints travel time to and from work often becomes excessively prolonged.

REFERENCES

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Exploitation of natural resources

Despite international law's prohibition on exploiting the natural resources of occupied territory, Israel has allowed Israeli private entrepreneurs to extract and profit from the mud and mineral resources from the Dead Sea. The company is owned by Mizpe Shalem and Qalya settlements and by Israeli firms controlled by Gaon Holdings, which markets the products made from these stolen resources in 29 countries.

Israel has permitted Israeli corporations to mine building materials in unregulated quarries on land of the Jordan Valley Regional Council and other parts of the West Bank. None of the revenue is used to benefit Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

Effects on Education and Health

The prohibition on new buildings have put an enormous strain on existing schools, which are overcrowded and lack basic amenities. As a result education has virtually ground to a halt and children are forced to travel for hours through military checkpoints to reach schools.

Basic healthcare services are also woefully inadequate, with just five villages receiving clinical services for one hour two days a week. Ambulances are in short supply and medics are frequently harassed and delayed at checkpoints by Israeli soldiers.

Israeli settlements and resources theft is illegal

Israel's exploitation of the natural resources of the Jordan Valley breaches fundamental provisions of international humanitarian law specifically it breaches the Hague Convention on the Law and Customs of War on Land (1907) and its accompanying regulations.

In 1983, the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled that the Hague Regulations prohibit the exploitation of resources of occupied territory for the economic needs of the occupying country.

The Hague Regulations also prohibits the confiscation of private property, forbids pillage and prohibits requisitions in kind except for military needs.

Establishment of settlements are prohibited, under article 49, of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The article expressly states that, "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." The 2004 Internal Court of Justice advisory opinion reaffirmed this, holding that the Israeli settlements are illegal under the Geneva Convention and that the transfer of a population to the occupied territory, directly or indirectly, is a war crime.

International human rights law enshrines the right of people to self-determination. The Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stating that "All peoples may, for the own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources...In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence".

