



People's Water Forum Submission 2

In response to call for inputs: “Human Rights and Starvation, with an emphasis on the Palestinian People’s Food Sovereignty”

This input is submitted as a part of a series of complementary submissions coordinated by members of the People’s Water Forum including¹: Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign²; Henry Thomas Simarmata, Apintlaw³; Muhammad Reza Sahib and Sigit Budiono, KRuHA (People’s Coalition for the Right to Water)⁴; Meera Karunanathan, Adrian Murray, Marcela Olivera and Leonard Shang-Quartey, Blue Planet Project⁵.

The objective of the three complementary contributions by the participants of the People’s Water Forum are:

1. To identify the denial of water as an essential part of Israel’s strategy of starvation of the Palestinian population in Gaza.
2. To highlight that denying water is a long-standing Israeli practice that stands as a gross violation of Palestinian human rights and is an integral part of Israel’s policies of apartheid, ethnic cleansing/forced displacement, and persecution against the entire Palestinian people. The current use of this practice as a component of Israel’s starvation strategy, among other genocidal acts being committed against the Palestinian people, is therefore only an exacerbation of long-existing practices.
3. To detail the impact of Israel’s water policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially Gaza, regarding the realization of the food sovereignty of the Palestinians.
4. Bearing this in mind, to give indications regarding effective solidarity and international obligations in front of Israel’s sustained and ongoing violations.

Submission 2: The reality of water pillage, water apartheid, and genocide through denial of access to water

¹ Water defenders, movements, communities, researchers, jurists, advocates and others gathered in Bali 21-23 May 2024 for the People’s Water Forum. The forum included an assessment of “water apartheid” and adverse effects on global water ecosystems, including food sovereignty, and sought to advance a water justice agenda against water apartheid. <https://thepeopleswaterforum.org/>

² [https:// stopthewall.org](https://stopthewall.org)

³ <https://apintlaw.info>

⁴ <https://kruha.org/>

⁵ <https://blueplanetproject.net/>

Prepared by: Blue Planet Project

1. Israel's policy of starvation, including the denial of access to water, is rooted in its 76-year-old goal to ethnically cleanse the Palestinian people.

2. Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Palestinian communities, and in particular the Bedouin communities in the Naqab (Negev), have faced systematic denial of access to water, which has been a critical tool of dispossession and marginalization. Despite being Israeli citizens, Bedouin communities are often denied basic water services.⁶ This deliberate policy aims to force the Bedouins to abandon their ancestral lands and move into government-planned townships. Unrecognized Bedouin villages, which are home to tens of thousands of people, are not connected to the national water grid, which compels residents to rely on expensive and unreliable water deliveries.⁷ Lack of access to water severely impacts Bedouin agricultural practices, health, and overall quality of life. Denying water is part of a broader strategy to uproot Bedouin communities from their lands, reflecting a long-standing policy of ethnic cleansing through resource deprivation.

3. Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank began in 1967, Palestinians have faced severe restrictions on their access to water, used as a tool for colonization and ethnic cleansing. In Bardala in the Northern Jordan Valley, Israeli authorities have systematically destroyed water infrastructure and severely limited water supplies to Palestinian residents.⁸ In 2017, Israeli soldiers demolished main pipelines and confiscated water pipes, forcing the villagers to buy water from Mekorot at exorbitant prices. In Khamat Makhoul, Palestinian Bedouins live mere meters from water pipelines but are forbidden from accessing them. These pipelines exclusively serve illegal Israeli settlements, leaving Palestinian families to struggle with purchasing costly trucked water. Al Hadidiya in the Northern Jordan Valley illustrates the ongoing struggle against Mekorot, as it continues a court battle for the right to sufficient water access.⁹ These cases highlight how water denial is systematically employed to displace Palestinian communities, facilitate the expansion of illegal settlements, and enforce an apartheid regime in the West Bank.

19. Since 1967, the people of Gaza have faced severe and escalating water crises because of systematic and deliberate Israeli occupation policies that restrict access to water resources, destroy water infrastructure during military operations, and degrade the natural water sources available to Palestinians in Gaza.¹⁰ This is compounded by the prohibition of importing materials necessary to maintain, repair or expand water facilities over 17 year blockade. Already before the start of the genocide on October 8, 95% of the water from Gaza's sole aquifer was unsuitable for consumption¹¹, leading to appalling sanitary conditions and high rates of waterborne diseases.

⁶ <https://www.972mag.com/the-unequal-right-to-water-in-unrecognized-bedouin-villages/>

⁷ <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/10033>

⁸ <https://www.hlrn.org/violation.php?id=p21pbKs=>

⁹ <https://stophthewall.org/2020/07/30/israeli-apartheid-jordan-valley-abu-saqr-and-his-family-arrested-charges-access-water/>

¹⁰ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-israel-weaponises-water-gaza-strip>

¹¹ <https://www.unicef.org/sop/reports/water-and-energy-crisis-gaza>

Only 4% of Gaza's households had access to safely managed water.¹² The lack of adequate water facilities has long forced Gazans to consume contaminated water, significantly increasing the incidence of waterborne diseases and other health issues or to rely on purchasing water from Israel's state-owned company, Mekorot, at prices unaffordable for many. According to OCHA, "Gaza depends on three Mekorot water pipelines that run from Israel to provide drinking water. Only one of them – Bani-Saeed – is currently [March 2024] operational, but only at 47% of its capacity. The other two have been non-operational for months."¹³

20. During the current genocide, the denying water to Gaza was one of the first steps and a critical component of the broader Israeli tactic of starvation faced by Palestinians.¹⁴ The UN and various humanitarian organizations have highlighted the severe impact of these tactics on Gaza's children, many of whom suffer from malnutrition and lack access to clean water.¹⁵ The combination of water scarcity, poor water quality, and food insecurity creates a dire situation that threatens the health and survival of the population, particularly the most vulnerable.

21. Israel's array of tactics also include flooding tunnels in Gaza with seawater.¹⁶ Such actions pose a grave threat to the already fragile water and sewage infrastructure, risking long-term contamination of Gaza's aquifer and soil. Environmental experts warn that this could lead to ecological catastrophe, leaving Gaza without drinkable water and further devastating agricultural capacities.

¹² <https://mideastenvironment.apps01.yorku.ca/2021/03/only-4-of-households-in-gaza-have-access-to-safe-water-pcbs-wafa/>

¹³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-infrastructure-under-attack-gaza>

¹⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

¹⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/almost-3000-malnourished-children-risk-dying-their-families-eyes-rafah-offensive>

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/23/israel-flooding-hamas-tunnels-seawater-risks-ruining-basic-life-gaza-expert>