

Lack of access to clean drinking water is a death sentence for the people of Gaza



15 Jan 2024

Israel-Palestinian Territory

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Geneva - The catastrophic lack of clean drinking water sources in Gaza City and the northern areas of the Gaza Strip has left Palestinians there facing a horrifying tragedy akin to a death sentence, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said in a statement issued Monday, citing the war crime as further evidence of the genocide Israel has been carrying out against the Strip's civilian population since 7 October 2023.

Distress is engulfing Gaza City and its northern regions in alarming ways—a result of Israel's cutting off of the water supply in the Gaza Strip, systematic and intentional Israeli bombing of water sources and wells, and a lack of fuel required to run water conversion and distribution facilities, said Euro-Med Monitor.

The human rights organisation warned that the lack of drinking water in the Strip has become a matter of life and death. It noted that residents are currently forced to drink unclean well water, which is contributing to the spread of transmitted and infectious diseases, especially amid the power outage and overall water supply shortage.

Prior to Israel's 100-day-long genocide, the Gaza Strip—one of the world's most densely populated areas—was already experiencing a crippling crisis in clean drinking water supplies. More than 90% of the population, or more than 2.3 million people, were living in a declining economic environment with the barest necessities.

Gaza City's main reservoirs, Al-Balad and Al-Rimal, were completely destroyed last weekend during an Israeli bulldozing operation in the area, the Euro-Med Monitor team confirmed. Al-Balad Reservoir, which houses a water well, a warehouse for water line maintenance equipment, and administrative offices for the city's water department, and Al-Rimal Reservoir, which includes the sanitation department's offices and a warehouse for sewage network maintenance equipment, have both been bulldozed during the Israeli ground incursion.

According to the Palestinian Water Authority, the ongoing Israeli military attacks have destroyed the water infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, including at least 65% of the water wells in Gaza City and the northern areas of the Strip.

Due to Israeli bombing, at least 12 wells in the area have been destroyed, resulting in an extreme and unprecedented water crisis in Gaza City. Prior to the Israeli military attacks on the Gaza Strip on 7 October, the Gaza municipality was pumping approximately three million cups of water per month. Israel's state-owned Mekorot company provided 700,000 cups per day, or 25% of the total amount. The desalination plant provided 10%, and the city's local wells provided roughly two million and 200,000 cups. Almost all of these sources have since ceased production.

The situation is made worse by the fact that the Israeli authorities are still placing tight restrictions on the flow of aid into the Gaza Strip, particularly into the northern areas and Gaza

City; this includes the fuel needed to run the water and sanitation facilities.

Since the beginning of its unprecedented military assaults, Israel has imposed a complete blockade on the Gaza Strip and stopped the flow of food, fuel, water, and other basic human necessities. Later, Israel's military began methodically and willfully destroying water tanks and stations.

Under international pressure, Israel has allowed the daily entry of 100 aid trucks into the Gaza Strip via the Rafah land crossing into Egypt. This is a far cry from the average load of 500 trucks that entered the Strip prior to 7 October to meet humanitarian needs.

According to Euro-Med Monitor, the lack of clean drinking water in the northern Gaza Strip is resulting in increasingly dire consequences and severe suffering for residents of the Jabalia refugee camp, who have not had access to it since the start of Israeli military attacks. A 73-year-old resident of the camp's "Block 4", Alian Fares Abdel-Ghani, told the Euro-Med Monitor team that residents are forced to drink salted water, which is necessary for daily survival but difficult to obtain. According to Abdel-Ghani, Israel's army destroyed the camp's two desalination plants, the Tiberias and the Shomer plants, shortly after the start of its ongoing attacks.

Abdul-Ghani stated that the cost of a gallon of water initially increased from one Israeli shekel (\$0.27 USD) to four shekels (\$1.08 USD) as a result of the Israeli bombing and the lack of fuel required to run other stations farther from the camp. After a few days, he continued, Israel shut off the water supply entirely. Many Jabalia families have tried to sterilise water and make it somewhat drinkable by boiling it over wood fires, he said, especially after diseases started to spread among them and children started getting diarrhoea and colic on a regular basis.

Euro-Med Monitor warned that excessive consumption of undrinkable salt water will lead to high blood pressure; kidney disease; increased risk of stroke, intestinal, and stomach diseases; constant vomiting; and diarrhoea. These side effects ultimately result in excessive dehydration of the body's tissues, particularly brain tissue. Drinking water drawn from wells without treatment could result in an imbalance in the body's salt content and cause dehydration, with children and elderly people being the most vulnerable due to weakened immune systems, and the potential for gastrointestinal infections to cause fatalities.

Given the scarcity of drinkable water, particularly following winter rains and floods, worries about waterborne and infectious diseases like cholera and chronic diarrhoea are high.

Euro-Med Monitor conducted an analytical study last month that included a sample of 1,200 people in the Gaza Strip in order to ascertain the impact of the humanitarian crisis experienced by residents of the enclave in the midst of Israel's genocidal war, ongoing since 7 October. Sixty-six per cent of the study sample reported having experienced diarrhoea, skin rashes, or intestinal diseases within the past month. According to the study, the rate of access to water in the Strip, including drinking, bathing, and cleaning water, is just 1.5 litres per person per day. This is 15 litres less than the minimum amount of water required for survival at the level required by international standards.

Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor stressed that international humanitarian law forbids attacks, destruction, or disruption of vital facilities necessary to the survival of the civilian population, such as drinking water facilities and networks. The rights organisation further emphasised that international humanitarian law strictly prohibits the use of starvation as a weapon. As an occupying power, Israel is obligated under international humanitarian law to provide basic needs and protection to the Gazan people.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provides that intentionally starving civilians by "depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies" is a war crime, added the Geneva-based rights group.

Euro-Med Monitor stated that Israel has been committing acts of genocide against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip since 7 October according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and pertinent international judicial rulings. Israel's crimes include depriving the civilian population of enough potable water, which has caused serious, intentional harm and trapped them in living conditions meant to destroy them.