

## **Water and Tourism in Palestine**

Water is the most vital element of our being; it is needed for all aspects of our lives and survival. In our region, this element will become scarce in the course of time due to a number of awareness, political and economic factors. These include factors of climate and lack of information. Furthermore, tourism, like many other aspects of Palestinian society, and water are controlled and monopolized by the Israeli Occupation forces in Palestine. The cause of future conflicts in the region, it is safe to say, based on the conclusions of many researchers conducted in this field, will revolve around the water issues and other important natural resources.

Water and tourism are two important of many other aspects of Palestinians livelihood. In Palestine, tourism is an important source of revenue as Palestinians depend to a great extent on trade in tourism, as well as the image that tourism brings to the Palestinian Political situation. Tourism has also become an important tool to portray the political situation by means of alternative and justice tourism. Hence, it is an instrument that can potentially alter the image of tourism in positive ways. That explains why Palestine has received tens and thousands of tourists who come to understand the political reality of the people- those we call the living stones of Palestine.

While in Palestine, some aspects of the situation are glaring and simply cannot be ignored. The Apartheid Wall that surrounds the Palestinian cities and villages, separating them into small blocks of land, controlling who comes in and who goes out, deny basic freedom of movement, livelihood, and separate people from people. One would find it impossible to miss out on the checkpoints, military towers and Israeli colonies everywhere. They are simply ‘in your face’ .

The Apartheid wall, checkpoints, military towers, Israeli colonies, is all part of the problem of resource stealth. In their particular way, each obstructs tourism and the water situation in Palestine. Colonies are strategically built housing projects, usually on high grounds, and on or around water springs and wells. While this is the case for colonies and settlers living in it, there are over than 200,000 Palestinians in the West Bank, who do not have access to water connections.<sup>1</sup>So, while a few wallows in luxury playing water games, watering expansive gardens, and play spaces, the Palestinians must be content with rationed water supply. The misdistribution of water is a serious question of justice. It is a typical case of apartheid in practice.

The systematic placement of colonies in the West bank is a means by which the Israeli government destroys any viable option of a Palestinian State. The consumption of water by settlers in the colonies extends to be “six times the water consumed by Palestinians.”<sup>2</sup>

Not only does the occupation veto construction of water resources and water drilling for Palestinians, but the act of settlers in various areas of Palestine is dangerously threatening to the

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1 <http://www.ewash.org/en/?view=79YOcy0nNs3D76djujAnkDTT>

2 <http://www.ochaopt.org/annual/c7/3.html>

existence of Palestinians especially when it comes to water supply. Settlers try to pollute those limited wells and springs used by Palestinians and then create conditions that prompt villagers to leave the area. In some cases, Palestinian farmers rely only on a small amount of water to use for their land and agriculture. In a fact sheet that was produced by the United Nations, office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, The humanitarian impact of the takeover of Palestinian water springs by Israeli settlers in March 2013, we read: “In recent years, Israeli settler activity has significantly impaired Palestinian access to, and use of, a growing number of water springs. The main methods used by settlers to that end have been threats and intimidation, and the erection of fences around the targeted areas”<sup>3</sup>

In the year 2012, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics registered 98 hotels as functioning in the West Bank area, and the number of users reached up to 575,221 with an occupancy rate of 1,338,535 for the number of guest nights. These numbers of course, economically speaking, are immense for the Palestinian society. However, in the context of the water situation that the West Bank faces, such a large number of people using more water than could be handled only means that more and more Palestinians from the west bank will receive less water due to the increasing demand from hotels to provide water for their guests. Moreover, hotels will have to buy water from Israeli sources. Israeli water suppliers make a handsome profit by charging them greater amounts than the water costs itself.

Palestine cannot afford to lose the waves of tourists visiting it. The Palestinians need the tourism sectors both for financial & political reasons, since it is one of the biggest sectors. Related sectors feed on it as well. And there are the political dimensions which bring benefit as pointed out in the beginning. This means that Palestine should remain steadfast in offering a hospitable environment and mood for the tourists. Sadly, the water issue is an impediment.

The Palestinian Code of Conduct for Tourism in the Holy Land, asks people to co-operate with locals in conserving precious natural resources, and to commit to a as moderate a use of water as possible.

The Palestinian dimension of the water problem lies within the colonial policies of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands, and therefore it should be addressed on an international level to pressure Israel to abide by international law and release its grip on the water resources in the Palestinian territories. On the other hand the water issue should be addressed on a regional and international level where new laws and regulations in tourism, ethical tourism, should be devised to protect the local communities from any form of exploitation. The unmanageable waste of water is the most important of them.

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3 [http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/OCHA\\_PalWaterSprings-Factsheet.pdf](http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/OCHA_PalWaterSprings-Factsheet.pdf)