



**International Conference: Sustainable Development
and Management of Water in Palestine**
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Intercontinental Hotel
Amman, Jordan

Address of Eng. Fadel Kawash, Head of the Palestinian Water Authority

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin my speech with a reference from the Holy Koran:

((Thou sees the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs).))

The Pilgrimage, Verse 5

Thus, it is an obvious matter that water is a critical element for life and for people.

Allow me to express my gratitude to all the financial supporters and organizers, and to all the participants, the scientists and experts, for their hard work, contributions and presence in this conference.

I would like to thank the King of Jordan, the government and our brothers in the Kingdom of Jordan for their supportive stance and continuous backing of the Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Abbas “Abu Mazen”.

In Palestine, we remain to suffer from the harsh living conditions which are affecting all aspects of society, namely security, economy, and health. This is due to the on-going Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, the military activities, which include daily sieges, closures, detentions and killings, and the robbing of our natural resources, mainly our water resources. Palestinians are prohibited from benefiting from their own water resources, which include the groundwater aquifers and the water from the Jordan River.

Regarding our renewable groundwater resources, 85% are stolen and remain under Israeli control and abuse. Our water resources are being pumped and transported by the Israeli National Water Carrier to the coastal region of Israel and even to the north of the Negev Desert, for Israeli domestic use and to irrigate their crops, cotton and banana crops among others. Palestinians in the West Bank are denied access to their groundwater basins to the point

which drilling a well in the Western or North-eastern aquifer requires approval by the Israeli parliament (the Knesset).

The entire Jordan Valley, which is a fertile area over 10 km long between the borders of Jordan and the West Bank, has been off-limits to Palestinians and designated as an Israeli military zone since 1967. All the water structures which had previously been built on the Jordan River banks and used for the irrigation of Palestinian lands in the valley region were confiscated by Israel. Thus, the Palestinians have been denied access to utilize the water of the Jordan River basin. The lower Jordan River has even become a stream of sewage, thus rendering it unsuitable for any use.

The average amount of available water for a Palestinian living in the West Bank is 50 l/c/d. Over 250 Palestinian towns and villages, with a total population of over 400,000, are deprived from basic water services. Not only are water sources in these regions unavailable, but water distribution networks are also not provided, thus the residents of these areas rely on alternative (and un-reliable) water sources, such as collection basins, scarce springs (usually polluted), surface agricultural ponds, and water purchasing from private tankers. The price of the purchased water reaches 20 NIS per m³, the equivalent of \$5 US per cubic meter, which is approximately 20% of the total family income. Major Palestinian cities and communities are also suffering from water cuts for prolonged periods of time, especially during the summer season.

Leakage and water losses from the current water distribution networks reaches 40% in Palestine, due to aging pipes and the deterioration of large portions of the networks, which in some areas are over 60 years old.

The Israeli authority has purposely neglected the Palestinian water distribution services and the wastewater collection and treatment services in all the districts of the West Bank. The main reason behind these acts is so that the Israeli authority may pressurize the Palestinian people into abandoning their lands and fleeing the country so that they may expand their settlements on the acquired land.

For the same reason, the Israeli authority has purposely neglected the development of water sources for the benefit of the Palestinian people, so that they remain dependent on the purchase of water from Mekorot, an Israeli water company. Currently, 55% of the water supplied to the West Bank is purchased from Mekorot. The main sources of water for the Mekorot Company are the Israeli wells which are drilled inside the West Bank. Thus, the main source of water for the Mekorot Company is Palestinian groundwater. The other source of water for the Mekorot Company comes from the Israeli wells drilled along the 'Green Line' and thus tap into the Western and North-eastern aquifers which are both considered Palestinian water resources.

As for the Gaza Strip, the situation is much more disastrous than it is in the West Bank. The groundwater in that region is being contaminated with sea water relatively quickly due to excessive pumping which has now reached approximately 160 million cubic meters per year. This means that they are over-pumping about 80 million cubic meters and this is causing

permanent destruction of the groundwater aquifers in the Gaza Strip. If swift action is not carried out, the Gaza aquifer may be completely destroyed beyond repair in a few years time.

Also, the deterioration of the water quality caused by wastewater contamination in the Gaza Strip and the destruction which has previously occurred and may occur in Beit Lahia remain to threaten the lives of the residents in that region.

Therefore, due to the continuous neglect of the water and wastewater services, the Israeli authorities are responsible and must be held accountable for the dire situation in the Gaza strip.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The difficulties and obstacles before us are great and complicated due to the on-going occupation and its military activities and due to the local and regional political conflicts. These have negatively affected the plans and projects of the Palestinian Water Authority, which has been working on improving the water and wastewater services and relieving the suffering of the Palestinian people ever since it was established, by carrying out development projects funded by granting nations and organizations.

The Palestinian Water Authority has completed several programs and projects with visible improvements. It is estimated that there has been a 40% improvement in the water situation since the signing of the Oslo II accords in 1995. In the past 11 years, approximately \$800 million (USD) have been invested for the development of the water supply and wastewater treatment. There are also investments for new projects reaching \$400 million (USD) for the coming three years.

The Palestinian Water Authority assumes the organizational functions and responsibilities of the public water sector in Palestine, according to the powers vested by the Water Law #3/2002. The Palestinian Water Authority is responsible for over seeing the rehabilitation of the water infrastructure, to build, develop and operate the public service sector, to develop the water supply by creating four regional water utilities and one bulk water utility, and to complete the development programs and projects for the rehabilitation of the water and wastewater service infrastructure. The ultimate goal is to supply every citizen with water, to eliminate the threats to water quality by wastewater contamination, and to allow wastewater reuse. The Palestinian Water Authority also assumes the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the transitional agreement regarding water and wastewater with Israel. The Water Authority also monitors the technical reports associated with the negotiations of the final state and the regional cooperation projects.

The efforts of the Palestinian Water Authority rely on the legal, legislative and institutional references, mainly the National Water Policy, the Water Strategy (which is backed by the Water Law #3/2002), the water permit, monitoring and tariff systems, as well as the Master Water Plan and implementation plans.

One of the top priorities of the Water Strategy in Palestine is the resolution of the water rights issue, to recover legal sovereignty and full control over our water resources and to regain the

ability to manage, plan and invest our water rights into the groundwater aquifers and the Jordan River.

The Water Strategy also includes the strengthening of the national water policies and systems, building and developing institutional capacity, improving the water information systems, organizing investments and development projects in the water supply and wastewater treatment service sectors, implementation of standards, pollution control, protection of the water resources from attrition, raising public awareness, ensuring general cooperation from all the districts on protecting and water resources and strengthening regional cooperation in the water sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are delighted to be part of this important international conference, which will discuss several issues that are directly related to our water situation and the obstacles which we face in this matter.

We greatly appreciate the efforts made in organizing this conference, selecting the scientific papers, especially the researches concerning capacity building funded by the UNESCO-FLANDERS FUST from the Flemish Government-Kingdom of Belgium, as well as the development projects regarding the water sector in Palestine, which were financially backed by other donor agencies, and the political and legal papers concerning water rights.

These topics, and others, which will be discussed in this conference should reinforce the concepts of management development and sustainability of the water sector in Palestine and will guide the decision makers, experts and employees of the PWA, as well as the government and non-governmental institutions.

Thank You for your presence.