

# **A Seeping Time Bomb: Pollution of the Mountain Aquifer by Sewage**

**Submitted by: Friends of the Earth Middle East**

## ***Key Players***

***Friends of the Earth Middle East***

***Israeli Water Commission***

***Palestinian Water Authority***

***Donors (USAID and German Development Cooperation)***

The most important water source for Israelis and Palestinians is under threat. Over 3 million people live above the Mountain Aquifer: the largest and most important water source to both Israelis and Palestinians. The sewage of the majority of that population receives no treatment at all and is discharged directly into the open environment, finding its way into groundwater. West Bank Palestinians and Israelis share this resource, failing to cooperate over its protection; they succeed in jointly polluting it. Solutions are within reach, however their implementation has been on hold for years.

Untreated sewage has already polluted many natural springs, rendering the consumption of their water impossible. Alarmingly, pollution also seeps rapidly into deeper groundwater. The continuation of pollution will lead to the destruction of large parts of the Mountain Aquifer, increasing water scarcity and intensifying water related conflict.

Despite the Palestinian and Israeli authorities and donors recognising the importance of protecting the Mountain Aquifer there has been little progress. Germany and the US have committed \$230 million for sewage infrastructure in the West Bank. However since 1993 only one project was completed while the others remain on hold.

While building sewage infrastructure in a conflict area is more difficult than in peaceful circumstances, it is nonetheless possible. Many other projects have been implemented in recent years. Failing to protect shared water resources is likely to lead to exacerbated humanitarian crises and to intensify conflict over scarce water resources.

Amongst other things, FoEME warns that donor countries postpone the implementation of projects so as to avoid conflict-related costs. In addition, there are significant inefficiencies in the coordination of some of them with local authorities. A recent report by Friends of the Earth Middle East identifies possible ways to move forward on protecting the precious shared water of the Mountain Aquifer.

## **For more information**

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