

## AMNESTY'S TRAVESTY

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*The Israeli occupation changed local agriculture profoundly. It introduced modern technology, including mechanization, precision tillage, pest control, plastic covering of crops for temperature control, high yielding varieties, postharvest processing of produce, marketing and export outlets. It also introduced efficient methods of irrigation, including sprinkler and especially drip irrigation. Consequently, output increased greatly, and farming was transformed from a subsistence enterprise to a commercial industry.*  
— Daniel Hillel, Rivers of Eden, Oxford University Press, 1994

The above excerpt is sufficient to heap richly-deserved ridicule on the recent Amnesty International report claiming that Israel's avaricious water policy has gravely compromised Palestinian Arabs' human rights. Miraculously, the Amnesty report was published to coincide perfectly with a vicious crusade launched across US campuses by Omar Barghouti, a Tel Aviv University graduate student, campaigning for - among other things - the boycott of Tel Aviv University, together with the entire Israeli academic establishment (avowed leftists and all).

By some curious coincidence, one of the issues raised by Barghouti to justify the BDS (boycott-cum-divestment-cum-sanctions) campaign was Israel's alleged exploitation of water resources to implement a process of "ethnic cleansing" and "apartheid." Predictably - if not persuasively - Amnesty denied any hint of collusion with the Barghouti initiative, emotively entitled "Palestine: Thirsting for Justice."

The facts, however, paint a very different - indeed antithetical - picture to that painted by the A/B (Amnesty/Barghouti) duo. For by every conceivable measure of consumption of fresh water, the lot of the Palestinian Arabs has improved dramatically - indeed beyond all recognition - since 1967 under Israeli administration, whether it be overall consumption, per capita consumption, consumption relative to Israel/Israelis, conveyance of running water to households, area under agricultural cultivation or size of the agricultural product.

In the period 1967-2006 the overall annual consumption of the Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank grew by 300 percent - from 60 million cubic meters to 180 million cu.m. The annual per capita consumption in the same period rose by almost 15% - from 86 cu.m. to 100 cu.m. By contrast the overall consumption by Israel dropped by 15% (from 1411 million cu.m. to 1211 million cu.m.), while the per capita consumption plummeted an amazing 300% from 508 cu.m. to 170 cu.m. - a decrease made possible not only by more efficient usage but also massive replacement of fresh water by recycled sewage for agricultural irrigation and of naturally occurring water by artificially produced (desalinated) water for domestic use. The Palestinian Arabs, by contrast, have steadfastly refused to undertake agreed upon sewage purification plants, allowing untreated effluents to endanger "downstream" Israeli supplies.

Moreover, from 1967 to the years preceding Oslo, the Palestinian Arab household consumption of water rose dramatically under Israeli rule - by almost 600%, significantly higher than in Israel where domestic consumption in the same period rose by approximately 230%. But not only did consumption by

households improve, so did conveyance to households. In 1967 only 50 West Bank villages were connected to a running water system whereas by the early 1990s the number rose to 260.

LIKEWISE, AS can be inferred by the opening citation from Hillel, there was a dramatic enhancement of agricultural performance - even though water allocations were not increased. This was facilitated by more advanced methods of cultivation/irrigation introduced under Israeli rule. (In this regard it should be remembered that Israeli farmers have had their water allocations significantly reduced since 1967.) This resulted in an increase of the cultivated area by about 160% and of the agricultural product by 1200%.

Furthermore, the malicious and mendacious claims that the luscious lawns and shimmering swimming pools in the Jewish settlements are unfairly and provocatively depriving Palestinians of water are belied by a single statistic. For Israel in fact conveys more water from inside the pre-1967 borders into the West Bank (nearly 56 million cu.m.) than the total consumption of the entire Jewish population in the settlements across the Green Line ( just over 48 million cu.m.).

In other words, there is a net inflow of water from pre-1967 Israel to the Palestinian Arabs which more than compensates for the sorely-maligned lawns and swimming pools. (In addition, Israel conveys about 5 million cu.m. to Gaza in accordance with the provisions of the Oslo Accords.) All these facts are studiously omitted from the Amnesty report - and from Barghouti's public appearances.

Indeed it is intriguing to note striking similarities between the language used and the issues raised in the document produced by Amnesty and in the advance fliers publicizing the allegedly unconnected Barghouti appearances. Both, for example, state that Israel is using around 80% of the aquifer leaving the Palestinians "with what is left."

This assertion is factually accurate but meaningless in terms of its significance and misleading in terms of its presentation. For while it is indeed true that Israel uses 80% of the waters of the aquifer today, in the pre-occupation times - before 1967 - it utilized 90% of these waters which flow naturally into the Coastal Plain and the Jezreel Valley. In other words, since the advent of occupation, there is actually more water available from the aquifer to the Palestinian Arabs - because of more efficient utilization and advances in irrigation techniques, increased use of recycled sewage and desalination by Israel.

Moreover while the A/B claims that per capita consumption of water by Israelis is much higher than that of the Palestinian Arab population are true, this is principally a result of differences in demand (rather than supply) due to differences in lifestyles. Similarly, different rates of consumption occur between the Jewish and Arab populations within pre-1967 Israel - and between different socioeconomic groups within the Jewish population - without anyone raising the claim that this is the result of purposeful deprivation.

WITH REGARD to supply stoppages (which by the way also regularly occur in Arab capitals such as Amman and Damascus), it should be stressed that Israel does not supply final Palestinian Arab consumers. Via its water utility Mekorot, Israel supplies Palestinian Arab providers (such the PA, municipalities and local and private water companies). It is these entities which deliver the water to the

final consumers, and it is they who initiate the overwhelming majority of stoppages. Typically these stoppages are due to theft, poor infrastructure maintenance or unpaid bills - a feature which even the Amnesty report is forced to grudgingly acknowledge.

Amnesty/Barghouti present a stream of amazingly similar heart-rending anecdotal evidence - typically presented without any independent corroboration - regarding the desperate distress of individual Palestinian Arabs, allegedly the victims of Israel's deliberate policy of deprivation. These, however, are indicative neither of the intentions nor the implications of overall policy. Significantly, an Israel response is seldom presented and when one is, it is laconically dismissed as untruthful by the author(s).

Moreover, even if there is some truth in these scattered accounts of local IDF abuse, they cannot be taken as representative of wider realities which the preceding figures clearly demonstrate. Indeed, little reflection is needed to realize the alleged destruction of individual cisterns and rooftop tanks would be a singularly ineffective method to use water as a depopulating technique when far more pervasive options are available.

In an incredibly mindless statement on its Web site, reflecting either immense ignorance or deliberate disregard of hydrological realities, Amnesty issues a demand which if ever implemented would spell certain doom for the aquifer - for Israelis and Palestinian Arabs alike: "Israel must... immediately lift all the restrictions it imposes on Palestinian Arabs' access to water..."

One can hardly wait for the next Amnesty report on inequitable use of shared water resources and for it to direct the same demands at, say, Egypt, whose coercive policy preventing making any upstream riparian use of the Nile flowing through their sovereign territory is causing widespread famine and starvation. This is especially acute in Ethiopia - which contributes most of the water to the Nile compared to Egypt's zero contribution.

One assumes that such a report must already be under preparation, for one can hardly believe that Amnesty would be guilty of applying a double standard to Israel, could one?