

# THIRST AS A WEAPON



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان  
AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



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## Introduction:

The Israeli occupation forces deliberately use water as a weapon of war in the Gaza Strip, pursuing a systematic policy aimed at depriving the population of water by targeting and destroying water sources, including wells, reservoirs, and water transmission and distribution systems. They also prevent the entry of equipment and spare parts necessary for repairing water networks, wells, and desalination plants, and block the import of engine oils and fuel required for their operation. This has hindered the regular functioning of the remaining water wells and desalination facilities. In addition, they prohibit the entry of chlorination equipment and pumps needed for water disinfection. These measures are accompanied by reductions in the quantities of water supplied by the Israeli company Mekorot, leaving civilians at the mercy of Israeli control over water supplies, which are used as a tool of collective punishment and harm.

The occupation of more than 60% of the total area of the Gaza Strip, in what is known as the “Yellow and Orange Zones”, has become an additional means of destroying and controlling water

resources and inflicting severe harm on the population. Israeli occupation forces prohibit residents from entering these militarily controlled areas, which contain large portions of the water infrastructure. They have destroyed wells, reservoirs, pumping stations, and sewage networks in these areas, or rendered them completely inoperative, exacerbating the water scarcity crisis, contamination, and the spread of diseases and epidemics among residents and displaced persons.

This report highlights the catastrophic collapse of the water situation in the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing war of genocide and the unprecedented escalation of health and psychological risks threatening civilian lives. It also examines the grave consequences of military control over more than 60% of the territory, accompanied by the systematic destruction and disabling of water facilities, treatment plants, and wastewater infrastructure. These actions have deprived hundreds of thousands of residents and displaced persons of access to safe water and have deepened the humanitarian and environmental catastrophe they continue to endure.

## Targeting Water Facilities and the Decline in Per Capita Water Availability

The Israeli occupation forces have extensively targeted public and private civilian infrastructure, particularly facilities indispensable to the survival of the population. As a result, approximately 80% of water and sanitation facilities, water transmission and distribution systems, and desalination plants have been either completely or partially destroyed. Consequently, there has been a significant decline in the quantity of water supplied to the population during the ongoing genocide.

The amount of water currently available has dropped to approximately **123,000 cubic meters per day**, compared to **300,000 cubic meters per day** before the war. In general, residents of the Gaza Strip rely on three primary sources of water:

- **Desalination plants**, whether for seawater or groundwater, which currently produce around **24,000 cubic meters per day**;
- **Groundwater wells**, managed by various entities including municipalities and small-scale well operators, which supply approximately **70,000 cubic meters per day**;
- Water supplied by the Israeli water company **Mekorot**, which currently provides approximately **29,000 cubic meters per day**, compared to **52,000 cubic meters per day** before the war.<sup>1</sup>

The water management crisis does not end there. Specialized sources indicate that the estimated **123,000 cubic meters of water produced daily** does not fully reach residents and displaced persons due to extremely high leakage rates, estimated at around **70%**. This is largely attributable to the deterioration of water systems and the continued destruction of residential neighborhoods and urban areas by the occupation forces. When water is pumped into the networks, substantial amounts leak beneath destroyed buildings and into areas that are inaccessible due to military restrictions. Water authorities are therefore unable to control or recover these losses, meaning that only about **30% of the produced water** effectively reaches the population<sup>2</sup>.

As a result, per capita water availability has declined dramatically, falling from **84.6 liters per person per day** before the war to approximately **22 liters per person per day**. Of this amount, only **6–7 liters are suitable for drinking**, while the remainder is contaminated. Furthermore, **97% of Gaza's groundwater fails to meet World Health Organization standards**, with chloride concentrations exceeding **1,500 mg/L**, indicating severe salinity levels<sup>3</sup>.

### Restrictions on the Entry of Equipment Necessary for the Development of the Water Sector

Efforts to develop and rehabilitate the water sector continue to face numerous challenges. Specialists confirm that since the ceasefire came into effect in October 2025, there has been no tangible change regarding the entry of equipment and materials required for the repair and development of water infrastructure. The occupying authorities continue to prohibit the import of engine oils needed for electrical generators, water tankers and vacuum trucks, as well as machinery and vehicles designated for water transportation. The last time such equipment was permitted entry was seven months ago, in November 2025, when certain international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), were able to bring in engine oils and water storage tanks with capacities ranging from 5 to 10 cubic meters<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Eng. Omar Shatat, Deputy Executive Director of the Water Authority in the Gaza Strip. Interview (11 May 2026)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Amid a complete electricity blackout, wells and pumping stations rely entirely on generators for operation. These generators require regular oil changes, particularly since most have exceeded their expected operational lifespan. Approximately **220 generators** remain in service today, with **70% operating beyond their technically and operationally safe limits** due to shortages of spare parts and maintenance oils necessary for their continued functioning. Operating for approximately **10 hours per day**, around **160 generators have already exceeded their recommended operational thresholds**, as generators require an oil change every **300 operating hours**, while some have been running for **500–700 hours without an oil change**. Water authorities have no alternative but to continue operating them in order to sustain essential water services and preserve human life, as their shutdown would effectively halt vital services. These generators remain vulnerable to sudden breakdowns.

Even international organizations are not exempt from these restrictions. **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)**, one of the largest non-governmental organizations supporting water production and distribution in the Gaza Strip, reported that since **1 January 2026**, the Israeli authorities have rejected all of its requests to bring in supplies through the designated humanitarian mechanism, which requires Israeli approval<sup>5</sup>.

The **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** has also reported that shortages of essential inputs, including fuel and lubricants, have forced Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) partners to continue operating approximately **200 facilities** using backup generators for more than two and a half years. Most of these generators are currently running on recycled oil, significantly increasing the likelihood of mechanical failures that cannot be repaired<sup>6</sup>.

With the approach of summer, rising temperatures, and increasing demand for water, any disruption to the operation of these facilities and generators is likely to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis and threaten the lives of civilians, particularly displaced persons who have lost their homes and are living in areas lacking even the most basic necessities of human life. According to relevant authorities, the number of shelters and displacement camps has risen to approximately **2,091 sites**, distributed as follows:

- **745** in Khan Younis Governorate;
- **607** in Gaza Governorate;
- **418** in the Central Governorate;
- **174** in Rafah Governorate; and
- **147** in North Gaza Governorate.

These shelters collectively accommodate approximately **192,962 families**<sup>7</sup>.

Another violation affecting civilians' access to water—and one that contributes to the deliberate deprivation of water and the transformation of Gaza into an area unfit for life—is the continued obstruction of the entry of water storage tanks and plastic containers used

<sup>5</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), (2026) Report entitled Arming Water. How Israel deprived Gaza of water and destroyed its systems and sewage networks.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory. Humanitarian Situation Report | 15 May 2026 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-report-15-may-2026>.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Social Development. (2026). Unpublished data obtained by the research team on June 4, 2026.

for transporting and storing water. This is despite the fact that such items are not classified as **dual-use goods**. At the same time, opportunities for local manufacturing have been destroyed through the targeting of factories and workshops and the prohibition of raw material imports<sup>8</sup>.

As a result, water tanks and plastic piping have become scarce and prohibitively expensive. The price of one meter of **half-inch (½") plastic pipe** has risen to approximately **US\$2**, representing roughly **nine to ten times its pre-war price**. This severely limits efforts to improve water supply systems and develop displacement camps that lack distribution systems. Displaced families are often unable to purchase new containers or replace old and unusable ones.

In a related development, although **UNICEF** was recently permitted to facilitate the entry of chlorine and chemical supplies necessary for desalination plants, water authorities continue to face significant challenges due to restrictions on the import of chlorination equipment, including chlorine injection pumps and the spare parts required for their operation. Approximately **40% of water wells lack such equipment**<sup>9</sup>, meaning that the water supplied through them cannot be adequately disinfected or chlorinated.

This situation has further increased the risk of water contamination. The extensive destruction of sewage systems, water pipelines, and wells has led to sewage leakage and increased the likelihood of wastewater mixing underground with domestic water supplies distributed to residents. In the absence of adequate chlorination, the risk of viral transmission and the spread of waterborne diseases has risen significantly.

### The “Yellow” and “Orange” Zones and the Disabling of Water and Sanitation Facilities

The Israeli occupation forces have established military control over more than **64% of the total area of the Gaza Strip**. The boundaries of the largest controlled area have been marked by large concrete blocks painted yellow (the “**Yellow Line**”). Available information indicates that this line delineates the area occupied by Israeli forces inside the Gaza Strip, which has expanded in a manner that violates the ceasefire agreement of **9 October 2025**. Under that agreement, Israeli forces were granted full control over approximately **53% of the territory**. Nevertheless, the occupation forces continued to destroy facilities and buildings east of the Yellow Line and constructed barriers and earthen berms throughout the area.

On **31 March 2026**, six months after the ceasefire took effect, the occupation authorities announced an updated map of the “**Orange Line**.” Under this new designation, Israeli-controlled territory expanded by an additional **11%** beyond the Yellow Line, increasing the proportion of land under military control to approximately **64%** of the Gaza Strip. The expanded area encompasses numerous vital facilities and installations, including

<sup>8</sup> Khader Ashniura, General Federation of Palestinian Industries. Interview (14 May 2026)

<sup>9</sup> Shatat, op. cit

infrastructure belonging to **UNRWA**, and further intensifies restrictions on the movement and operations of humanitarian and relief organizations<sup>10</sup>.

Monitoring conducted by the Center indicates that, since the ceasefire was declared, Israeli forces have expanded rather than gradually withdrawn their military presence. They have established new military positions and barracks and continued the systematic destruction of public facilities, infrastructure, and residential communities. Residents are prohibited from approaching or accessing these areas under threat of direct attack and live fire. Moreover, the effects of military control extend beyond the officially declared boundaries through near-daily incursions and repeated shootings directed at civilians, further reducing the areas available for civilian use.

The consequences of this control extend beyond preventing Palestinians from returning to their homes, properties, and agricultural lands and exposing them to direct attacks. It has also significantly worsened access to drinking water, reduced the ability to benefit from wastewater treatment facilities, undermined public health, and rendered approximately **90 water wells** located east of the Yellow and Orange Lines inoperable<sup>11</sup>.

This is particularly significant because groundwater wells located in the eastern areas under Israeli military control are generally less contaminated than those situated in western areas closer to the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, **three Mekorot water supply lines** pass through these controlled areas:

- The **Al-Muntar line**, east of Gaza City, supplies approximately **12,000 cubic meters per day** and serves Gaza Governorate.
- The **Bin Saeed line**, east of Al-Maghazi refugee camp, supplies approximately **5,000 cubic meters per day** and serves the Central Governorate.
- The **Bani Suheila line**, which supplies approximately **14,000 cubic meters per day** and serves Khan Younis Governorate.

These figures are estimates. In practice, the volume supplied through these lines is usually around **29,000 cubic meters per day**, occasionally increasing to approximately **31,000 cubic meters per day**.

When technical failures occur in these pipelines, details of the faults are often unavailable, and Palestinian technical teams are not permitted to carry out repairs. Instead, Israeli authorities require that repairs be undertaken by Israeli contractors, resulting in lengthy delays. In some cases, water lines have remained out of service for as long as **ten months** due to unresolved faults, while residents continue to face severe water shortages.

Within the Israeli-controlled military zone there are approximately **22 pumping stations and wastewater facilities**, in addition to around **20 small desalination plants**. Across the Gaza Strip, there are **78 wastewater pumping stations**<sup>12</sup>, of which **62 stations** have either been completely destroyed or are located east of the Yellow Line. As a result of the

<sup>10</sup> Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement. (May 13, 2026) Between the Yellow Line and the Orange Line – Fact Sheet. <https://gisha.org/en/between-the-yellow-and-orange-lines/>

<sup>11</sup> Eng. Omar Shatat, Deputy Executive Director of the Water Authority in the Gaza Strip. Interview (20 May 2026)

<sup>12</sup> CMWU, Coastal Municipalities Water Utility. (April 25, 2026). A distress call.

[https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1398492725655488&set=pcb.1398493338988760&locale=ar\\_AR](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1398492725655488&set=pcb.1398493338988760&locale=ar_AR)

occupation's control over these areas, water authorities have been forced to discharge wastewater without treatment.

The **16 operational public sewage pumps** collect wastewater from residential neighborhoods and displacement camps and discharge approximately **40,000 cubic meters per day** into the sea. In addition, around **15,000 cubic meters per day** seep into the groundwater aquifer<sup>13</sup> through absorption pits in Khan Younis, Gaza City, and the Central Governorate.

These wastewater flows remain untreated because **five wastewater treatment plants** are currently out of service. Most of these facilities are located within areas under Israeli control, while the only plant situated outside the Yellow Zone has sustained significant damage as a result of attacks<sup>14</sup>.

Occupation forces have also targeted personnel working in water services near the boundaries of these controlled areas and have obstructed efforts to deliver water to displaced populations who depend on truck-mounted water tankers for their supply. The most recent attack on water-sector personnel occurred on the morning of **17 April 2026**, when workers filling water tankers in the **Al-Mansoura area of the Shuja'iyya neighborhood in Gaza City** were targeted.

UNICEF, which had contracted the workers involved, reported that the incident resulted in the death and injury of **four truck drivers** responsible for transporting desalinated water to families and displaced persons. According to UNICEF, the drivers were carrying out routine water-filling operations and had made no changes to their movements or procedures at the time of the attack. Following the incident, UNICEF was compelled to suspend activities at the site<sup>15</sup>.

### Deteriorating Water Quality and Its Impact on Health and the Environment

Monitoring of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip indicates that there has been no improvement in either the quantity or quality of water reaching residents. Monthly tests conducted by the Ministry of Health show that **95% of the water supplied to the population is contaminated and unchlorinated**, creating conditions conducive to the proliferation of bacteria and viruses. Water transportation and storage processes are also vulnerable to contamination, contributing to the persistence of waterborne diseases at consistently high levels.

The Ministry of Health continues to record cases of waterborne illnesses, including **bloody diarrhea** and **acute diarrhea**, which pose heightened health risks to vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly. Cases of **Hepatitis A** continue to be reported, alongside a rise in skin diseases<sup>16</sup>.

The **Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU)** has warned of a genuine risk of epidemic outbreaks, particularly in light of rising temperatures, the collapse of the healthcare system, shortages of medicines and medical supplies, and the spread of

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Eng. Omar Shatat, Deputy Executive Director of the Water Authority in the Gaza Strip. Interview (11 May 2026)

<sup>15</sup> Statement by UNICEF on the killing of two water truck drivers in the Gaza Strip(2026)

<https://www.unicef.org/sop/press-releases/statement-unicef-killing-two-water-truck-drivers-gaza-strip>

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Nidal Ghoneim, Head of the Epidemiology Department at the Ministry of Health's Department of Preventive Medicine. Interview on (14/5/2026)

infectious diseases. The increase in skin infections and respiratory illnesses has been linked to exposure to sewage water in residential areas and informal displacement settlements<sup>17</sup>.

Testimonies from displaced persons living in camps indicate that they face serious threats to their lives and well-being. In testimony provided to a researcher from the Center, **Yasser Anwar Mohammed Abu Habl (38 years old)**, who is married and has a family of six, stated:

“Together with a group of young men, I established Al-Amal Camp (3), located on the seashore west of Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip. The camp consists of tents housing approximately 120 families, with a total population of around 720 people. Residents depend on water delivered by tankers, which arrive daily except on Fridays. The camp receives approximately 10 cubic meters of water per day, which amounts to roughly 10 liters per person per day after accounting for losses during filling and the water remaining at the bottom of storage tanks. This quantity is insufficient for drinking and personal hygiene and often leads to conflicts, particularly on Saturdays when children, men, and women compete to fill containers. Arguments and psychological stress are common among displaced persons, who are forced to prioritize drinking water over personal hygiene, bathing, and washing clothes. The camp is located near the sea and experiences high humidity, yet there is not enough water for bathing. Recently, children have developed skin lesions, and the physician who visits the camp confirmed that poor environmental conditions and inadequate hygiene resulting from water shortages are significant factors affecting both physical and mental health.”<sup>18</sup>

The inadequacy and poor quality of water in the Gaza Strip constitute a direct and major cause of numerous public health problems. The deteriorated condition of water systems, taps, wells, and pipelines facilitates the spread of waterborne diseases, while water scarcity further increases health risks.

According to the **Sphere Standards**—an internationally recognized humanitarian framework that establishes minimum standards for populations affected by conflict, disasters, and displacement—the minimum quantity of water required for drinking and domestic hygiene is **15 liters per person per day**<sup>19</sup>.

In this regard, **Engineer Omar Shatat**, Deputy Executive Director of the Water Utility, stated that after three years of displacement, the quantity of acceptable and safe water available to residents is only **6–7 liters per person per day**, which is significantly below the minimum standard recommended even for disaster situations. The remaining water available to residents comes from Gaza’s groundwater resources, which are contaminated and contain harmful compounds due to high chloride concentrations. In many cases, this water is unsuitable even for bathing and washing.

**Hassan Nouh Abu Al-Omrain (46 years old) explained:**

“We are forced to transport water manually every day, carrying buckets and jerrycans and climbing stairs to bring water to my apartment on the sixth floor. This causes physical

<sup>17</sup> CMWU, Coastal Municipalities Water Utility. (April 25, 2026). A distress call.

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<sup>18</sup> Yasser Anwar Abu Habal. Displaced person in Al-Amal Camp (3), west of Nuseirat Camp, interviewed on 14/5/2026

<sup>19</sup> Sphere, Sphere's [guide](#) to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. Geneva, Switzerland, 2018.

exhaustion, pain, and bone-related health problems, and worsens the condition of those suffering from spinal disc or knee cartilage disorders.”

Similarly, **Fakhri Ibrahim Al-Ghoul (50 years old)**, a resident of Beach Camp, stated:

“Water reaches us in relatively acceptable quantities, but its quality is extremely poor. It is highly saline, yellowish in color, and has an unpleasant odor. Using it affects the skin, hair, and teeth, and we suffer from widespread skin diseases. Obtaining desalinated drinking water is difficult because of the limited quantities available through designated water delivery vehicles. We use desalinated water for both drinking and bathing because of the poor quality of the domestic water supplied to us. During the summer, demand will increase significantly. We have also noticed that the desalinated water delivered to us is sometimes contaminated with sand and dirt because tanker hoses come into contact with the ground during filling operations. Overall, we suffer from stomach-related illnesses, and doctors have diagnosed several residents in the neighborhood with bacterial stomach infections.”

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The information presented in this report indicates that residents of the Gaza Strip face serious and immediate risks due to both the scarcity of water and the deterioration of its quality. According to the report, this situation is the result of a systematic policy pursued by the occupying forces within the context of the ongoing genocide, aimed at creating conditions that are unlivable for the civilian population.

This policy includes the organized targeting of water infrastructure, including wells, major reservoirs, transmission systems, and water-sector personnel, as well as restrictions on maintenance and the prohibition of equipment and materials necessary to sustain even minimal water-sector operations. As a result, per capita water availability has fallen to levels far below internationally recommended minimum standards for conflict and humanitarian emergency settings. At the same time, waterborne diseases continue to spread, reflecting the severe deterioration of public health and environmental conditions throughout the Gaza Strip.

The occupation forces continue to attack water facilities and personnel and prohibit the entry of essential tools and equipment required to maintain minimum water services. They have also exploited their control over more than **60% of the Gaza Strip** to render water infrastructure in these areas inoperative, particularly wastewater treatment facilities. This has led to increased contamination of groundwater and coastal waters by untreated sewage, further worsening health conditions, especially for displaced persons living in areas lacking water systems and receiving insufficient quantities of water for personal hygiene. These conditions are also expected to pose serious health risks to users of Gaza’s coastline.

Accordingly, the water crisis and the associated public health consequences are presented as the outcome of a deliberate policy implemented by the occupying authorities and accompanied by attacks on healthcare infrastructure. On the one hand, these measures create conditions that facilitate disease outbreaks through severe water shortages, water contamination, and sewage overflows; on the other hand, they undermine the healthcare system’s capacity to respond.

Restrictions on restoring electricity supplies, the prohibition of engine oils and spare parts, and bans on the entry of vehicle tires and batteries are described as measures that prevent

improvements in both the quantity and quality of available water and obstruct its delivery to the population. Since drinking water is transported almost exclusively by tanker trucks equipped with storage tanks, shortages of spare parts, lubricants, and tires threaten to halt these services in the same way they jeopardize the operation of electrical generators.

The **Al Mezan Center for Human Rights** considers the international community's tolerance of restrictions imposed on the restoration of electricity for a third consecutive year, the prohibition of alternative energy sources such as solar power systems and generators, and the obstruction of access to sufficient and clean water for the population to constitute a decision that results in the deaths of additional civilians without the use of shells or missiles.

## Recommendations

The **Al Mezan Center for Human Rights** calls for the following:

1. **Urgent international intervention** to halt the ongoing genocide, end attacks on infrastructure indispensable to civilian survival—particularly water wells, desalination plants, transmission systems, and electrical generators—ensure the protection of humanitarian workers, end impunity for perpetrators of crimes, and enforce international legal obligations, including the decisions of international legitimacy mechanisms and the International Court of Justice.
2. **An end to the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip**, restoration of electricity supplies, and the unrestricted entry of all equipment and materials necessary for operating the water sector, including diesel fuel, lubricants, disinfection materials, chlorination pumps, raw materials required for plastic manufacturing, and mobile desalination units with all necessary components. The report also calls for the resumption of water supplies from Mekorot at volumes exceeding pre-war levels, which were estimated at approximately **52,000 cubic meters per day**.
3. **Immediate action by the international community and United Nations agencies** to provide mobile housing units, facilitate the return and relocation of displaced persons to their original residential areas, ensure dignified and healthy living conditions, establish water distribution systems within camps and shelters, and provide large-capacity water storage tanks so that civilians—particularly vulnerable groups—can access safe and sufficient quantities of water.
4. **Humanitarian and development organizations** should intensify efforts to provide additional quantities of water, distribute hygiene supplies, and supply appropriate plastic containers for water transport and storage. They should also support residents in replacing old and unsuitable containers and raise awareness among displaced populations about contamination risks and safe water-handling practices.