



In focus: the effects of Israel's military offensive on Gaza's WASH facilities



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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the effects of Israel's military offensive on Gaza's WASH facilities



Gaza Strip 2021



Al Mezan Center for Human Rights

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental human rights organization in the Gaza Strip, that holds Special Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Since its establishment in 1999, Al Mezan has dedicated itself to protecting and advancing the respect for human rights, and enhancing democracy and community and citizen participation in the oPt, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

Palestine – Gaza Strip

Main office

5/102-1 Al Mena, Omar El-Mukhtar Street
Western Rimal, Gaza City, Gaza Strip
P.O. Box 5270 Telfax: +970-(0)8-2820442 /7

Jabalia office

1st floor, Al Eilah Building, Al Trans Square, Jablaiya camp, the Gaza Strip. P.O. Box: 2714
Telfax: +970-(0)8-2484555 /4

Rafah office

1st floor, Qishta Building, Othman Bin Affan St.,
Rafah. Telfax: +970-(0)8-2137120

Email: info@mezan.org

Website: www.mezan.org

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www.mezan.org



Between 10-21 May 2021, Israeli forces carried out a full-scale military offensive against the Gaza Strip. The bombardment was characterized by a disproportionate use of force and deliberate attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, in clear violation of the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality, and humanity enshrined in customary international humanitarian law and amounting to apparent war crimes and crimes against humanity.

During the military campaign, Israel targeted and damaged many civilian infrastructure, including Gaza's sewage treatment stations and networks, rendering some of them inoperable. [As reported by Al Mezan](#), the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO) recently announced that its power supply services will be intermittent due to the diminishing supply of fuel used to generate electricity, caused by Israel's fuel-entry ban. With the increasing deficit in power supply and limited capacity of alternative generators, municipalities throughout the Gaza Strip are pumping raw or partially treated sewage water directly into the sea, thus blighting one of Gaza's few recreational spots, namely its shoreline. As a result, nearly two million Palestinians residing in Gaza now face a looming public health emergency and are denied Gaza's only outlet.

Among the most affected facilities during Israel's military offensive against the Gaza Strip are water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. According to Al Mezan:

As a result of Israel's attacks, 18 sewage water pumps were damaged, including six that were completely destroyed.¹ During the offensive, four of Gaza's central sewage treatment stations were unable to function as employees were unable to travel to their workplace due to the intensity of the situation, amidst a general breakdown in the stations' work schedule and the damage inflicted on sanitation networks.² Israel's targeting of vital paved roads and other infrastructure in Gaza caused damages to some 18,734 meters of the sewage networks. The sewage treatment stations will not be able to operate at full capacity again until the networks are repaired.³



In order to operate power stations and compensate for GEDCO's intermittent power supply, an increased fuel supply is required. However, the Israeli authorities continue to ban fuel shipments into Gaza, including on the local market for consumption by citizens and various institutions.⁴ The electricity crisis persists despite the fact that GEDCO's supply has increased after Israel repaired the main power lines, still leaving Gaza with a deficit of 69% of its demand. Accordingly, the

¹ Figures reported in a preliminary survey from the Ministry of Local Government in Gaza obtained by Al Mezan on 31 May 2021.

² Ahmed Abu Ras, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Local Government in Gaza, interviewed by Al Mezan on 26 May 2021.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



population in Gaza is now receiving six hours of electricity per day, followed by at least 12 hours of power cuts. Up until Sunday evening, 30 May 2021, Palestinians in Gaza received only three to four hours of electricity per day, seriously hampering municipal services.⁵

Due to the ongoing electricity crisis, Gaza's municipalities continue to pump wastewater through eight main and nine temporary marine pumps. Combined, these pumps receive wastewater from 87 different stations across the Gaza Strip, eventually pumping around 70,000 cubic meters of untreated sewage into the sea on a daily basis.⁶ For instance, during the offensive, Israeli forces destroyed the Al Muntada pumping station belonging to the Gaza municipality and, as a result, the municipality started to pump 13,000 square meters of untreated sewage into the sea every day.⁷ Similarly, Israeli forces bombed the carrier line of the Amer pump in the al-Sudaniya area serving the Jabaliya and Beit Lahiya municipalities. As a result, the pump began pouring 10,000 square meters of untreated sewage into the sea daily.⁸

Should the electricity crisis continue, and until the damaged stations and carrier lines are repaired, official authorities predict that the quantities of untreated sewage pumped into the Mediterranean Sea will reach 110,000 cubic meters per day.⁹ Yet such predictions are hardly surprising in Gaza, where WASH services have been on the verge of collapse for years due to Israel's illegal closure and repeated military attacks. Gaza's chronic water and sanitation crisis has already increased sea contamination: as reported by the Environment Quality Authority (EQA) of the Palestinian Ministry of Health in their most recent examination, in August 2020 the percentage of sea pollution had reached 63% in the total coastal area.

While no examinations have taken place yet this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Israel's sea closure, the next one, which should be held in the coming days, will most likely register an increase in the level of pollution in light of the current crisis.¹⁰ In the meantime, the EQA has asked citizens of the Gaza Strip not to swim in the sea because of the high rate of pollution. Similarly, Gaza's municipality also warned the population about water pollution and confirmed that it started pumping untreated sewage into the sea on Saturday, 29 May 2021.¹¹

⁵ GEDCO's daily report on the state of power line leading to 9:00pm on Sunday, 30 May 2021.

⁶ Baha al-Din al-Agha, Director at the Water and Environment Quality Authority in Gaza, interviewed by Al Mezan on 30 May 2021.

⁷ Information gained from Anwar al-Jundi, Coordinator of the General Administration of Water and Sanitation in Gaza Municipality, interviewed by Al Mezan's researcher Bassem Abu Jay on 26 May 2021.

⁸ Information gained from Atef al-Sultan, Director of the Health, Water and Sanitation Department in Beit Lahiya Municipality, interviewed by Al Mezan's researcher Hussein Hammad on 26 May 2021.

⁹ Khaled al-Teibi, Director of the Health and Environment Department at the Ministry of Health, interviewed by Al Mezan's researcher Hussein Hamman on 30 May 2021.

¹⁰ Baha-al-Din al-Agha, General Director of the General Administration for the Environmental Protection at the EQA, interviewed by Al Mezan's researcher Hussein Hammad on 30 May 2021.

¹¹ See supra note 2.



Accordingly, Al Mezan calls on:

- a. The international community to promptly intervene in support of civilians and the infrastructure needed for their survival, especially WASH facilities and services; to pressure Israel to allow the necessary fuel into Gaza for the operation of the power plant per the electricity demands, and to enable the municipalities to carry out their necessary and vital activities, especially those related to WASH service and infrastructure projects.
- b. The international community and specialized INGOs to address the situation by urgently finding solutions to the root causes of the current water and sanitation crisis, which has led to the pumping of untreated sewage into the sea and increased water, air and ground pollution.
- c. The competent authorities to increase the level of coordination and cooperation in order to address the impact of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, notably by giving priority to the reconstruction process and reparation of vital facilities, including electricity, water and sanitation networks.



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