

Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations at the Review session of CSD-13 Decisions on Water and Sanitation (CSD-16), New York , Monday 12 May 2008

Palestine shares the concerns and problems that most developing nations have with regards to water and sanitation. At the same time, Palestine confronts other problems unique to its situation as a country still living under foreign occupation.

Mr. Chairman,

The Middle East region is known for the scarcity of water. Though this shortage is caused by nature and not man-made, it is compounded by the lack of cooperation and sometimes hegemony of one party's rights and access over the others'.

Due to the control of Israel, the Occupying Power, over the water resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Palestinians are only allocated 120 million cubic meters of freshwater out of the 850 million cubic meters water aquifers in the occupied West Bank produce. Consequently, the current domestic water supply for Palestinian households only amounts to between 57 and 76 liters per day, which is significantly lower than the World Health Organization's minimum for domestic water consumption. And due to the destruction of water networks and the continued siege of Palestinian villages and cities, Palestinian households now pay 12% more of their household income on water, bringing into question their very ability to access fresh water... After all, the first requirement of accessibility is affordability and this requirement, in many cases now in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, is not met.

Mr. Chairman,

In its review of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory reported that because of the continued military assaults on Palestinian cities and villages, "the erosion of water and sanitation infrastructure... risks contamination of ground and surface water through salinity, nitrates" and other contaminants. In Nablus, an alarming increase in bacteriological contamination. of piped water has been found as the measured contamination rate has reached 59 percent.

Equally devastating, the chloride level in 90% of the water in Gaza has risen to 500 mg per liter, which is double the level allowed internationally. This situation is further compounded by interruption of Sewage treatment due to the lack of a steady electricity supply within the Gaza, Israeli occupation restrictions on fuel imports, and prohibitions on the import of materials and necessary spare parts. OCHA reports that since January 2008 nearly 50 to 60 million liters of partially treated and untreated sewage from the Gaza Strip have been flowing daily into the Mediterranean Sea. Some pumping stations cannot even pump the sewage and are letting it flow into lagoons in residential areas. This places Gaza families at risk of serious pollution of drinking water and epidemics.

When it comes to contamination though, there is no greater source of environmental devastation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, than the

illegal settlements and the approximately 200 factories they host. These factories produce toxins such as lead, Zinc, aluminum, Cadmium and others, which devastate the land, agriculture, and underground water in the area.

Also contributing to the water crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, is the construction of the Wall in the West Bank by Israel, the Occupying Power. During the first phase of its construction, the Occupying Power, confiscated 200 cisterns and 36 groundwater wells while threatening at least 14 others. In fact, the Wall confiscates the West Bank's richest water sources, including the rich Western aquifer, leaving Palestinians literally thirsty. Logically, these confiscations and demolitions only compound the already grave water situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to remind that these problems were also discussed during CSD-13 and member states resolved "to take further effective measures to remove obstacles to the full realization of the rights of the peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, which are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and must be combated and eliminated". Unfortunately nothing has changed since then and now Palestinians face harsher obstacles by the occupation that continues to impede their economic or social development.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

The problems I have discussed today have far-reaching effects and they not only violate the Palestinians' basic rights, they threaten the very prospects of development. Together with the generous international community, the Palestinian Authority looks forward to working tirelessly on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the water and sewage infrastructure. These efforts are essential in enabling Palestine to be an active player in turning the development goals into reality for Palestinians and others in the region.

In order for cooperation in the region to exist in the water and other sectors, occupation and hegemony must first come to end. Cooperation can only flourish and yield positive results when no one party enjoys the benefits of a scarce resource to the detriment of another.

Thank you Mr. Chairman