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Black and white tanks, each capable of holding 1,500 liters of water, rest on top of a school n

Black and white tanks, each capable of holding 1,500 liters of water, rest on top of a school near the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank, Aug. 22, 2022. Israel has strict control of water sources for Palestinians. (CNS photo/Debbie Hill)



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Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are facing a severe water shortage during the heat of the summer months because Israel will not develop the water infrastructure in certain areas, said the justice and peace commission of the Catholic ordinaries of the Holy Land.

Israel has strict control over all water resources in Palestine -- both in areas under their direct control and areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority -- said an Aug. 19 statement from the commission. This, combined with natural water shortages caused by climate change, is causing "dire hardship," the commission said.

"This is not only causing drastic shortages, but also the degradation of the quality of water when it is available," the commission said. "Water is a vital resource for human existence. The right to water is also a basic right."

Palestinian farmers in rural areas are the most affected by the restrictions and are forced to buy water at five to nine times the regular price, the commission said. Many of the farmers cannot afford this and are forced to abandon their agricultural lands, which then can be confiscated by Israeli authorities.

In addition, Israel prevents dozens of communities from connecting to a functioning water grid, forcing them to buy water privately at considerable cost, the commission said.

"The cost increases when water must be transported in areas where there is no easy road access due also to developmental neglect," they added.

The commission said hundreds of cisterns have been destroyed by the Israeli army or settlers in the past 15 years, in what it called a concerted effort to remove the Palestinian farmers from their lands in order to amplify the presence of the settlers.

"We call on the Israeli authorities to respond to this basic human need and allow residents of Palestine to construct water cisterns and repair destroyed ones in order to gather rain water and store purchased water."

"The need for water is universal, and God sends his rain down on one and all," the commission added.

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