



Oral statement

Item 3 - Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights
15 September 2020

As we mark the tenth anniversary of the codification of the human rights to water and sanitation, the Gaza Strip is being forced further away from the realization of these fundamental rights. In his report, Special Rapporteur Heller provided conceptual and empirical elements for complying with the minimum core obligations of the human rights to water and sanitation—criteria such as availability, accessibility, affordability and safety. Israel, the occupying power in the Gaza Strip, comes up short in every area.

Between 13-31 August 2020, Israel launched a series of additional punitive measures on Gaza that included a ban on fuel shipments. As a consequence, Gaza's water pumps—one of the several public services needing electricity to run—were limited to just 3-4 hours functioning, followed by the 16-hour power cut. The longstanding water and sanitation crisis became acute. Only slightly ameliorated, today Gaza's residents receive a maximum of 6 hours of electricity at a time, still not enough to implement the basic public health measures—such as hand hygiene—to combat the rapid spread of the coronavirus, the first cases of which were detected in the community on 24 August. Under lockdown and unable to access sufficient and safe water in their homes, the health and hygiene of Gaza's two million residents is increasingly at risk.

In her opening statement, High Commissioner Bachelet recalled that, as a direct result of Israel's illegal closure and blockade, more than 90% of the water from aquifers in Gaza is undrinkable. According to UN OCHA, only 4% of Gaza's water is fit for human use and consumption.

Under these conditions, the fulfilment of the human rights to water and sanitation cannot be met. In particular, the current situation does not ensure Gaza's residents access to (1) the minimum essential amount of water that is sufficient and safe for personal and domestic uses to prevent disease, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) the minimum essential level of accessibility to water facilities or services; (3) water and sanitation facilities at an affordable price; and (4) safe and drinkable water.

Al Mezan stresses that this crisis, and its impact on the population's wellbeing is the primary responsibility of Israel, the occupying power. We, therefore, take the opportunity to urge this Council and its Member States to pursue the rights of Palestinians to water and sanitation and to address the root causes of the escalating crisis in the Gaza Strip by calling on Israel to fully, immediately and unconditionally end its illegal closure and collective punishment imposed on Gaza.