

Press Release:
Red Sea Dead Sea Water Conveyance Study challenged before
World Bank Inspection Panel

Ramallah, 27 July 2011. The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR), the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (Stop the Wall Campaign) and the Palestinian Farmers Union filed a Request for Inspection with the World Bank Inspection Panel. The Request for Inspection challenges the Red Sea Dead Sea Water Conveyance Study, which is examining the feasibility of a canal to divert water from the Red Sea into the Dead Sea. The aim of the project is to replenish water in the Dead Sea which has been shrinking for years.

The Requesters state that the study fails adequately to take into account alternatives to the Red Sea Dead Sea conduit, including the alternative of rehabilitation of the Jordan River, much of which is currently diverted to Israel with the accompanying denial of access to water of Palestinians in the West Bank. Meaningful exploration of such alternatives is required by the World Bank's own operational policies and procedures. The Jordan River alternative will also mitigate the environmental damage to the Dead Sea as well as along the Jordan River itself, and such mitigation is a priority consideration according to the World Bank's own policies.

Jamal Juma', coordinator of the Stop the Wall Campaign, said: "We are disheartened to see the World Bank once again involved in a project that creates at least apparent sustainability for ongoing Israeli human rights violations. Israel purposefully uses water theft as a means for forcible displacement of the indigenous Palestinian population. In addition to playing a major role in depleting the Jordan River, Israel deprives the impoverished Palestinian communities in the area of most of the remaining water resources. It has only recently announced the confiscation of additional 140,000 dunums of Dead Sea land, thereby further limiting Palestinian access to the Dead Sea, let alone economic development of its touristic and natural resources. The Bank's refusal to seriously examine alternatives that restore the water flow of the Jordan River and that can support the existence and persistence of the Jordan Valley communities in the area invariably plays into the hands of Israeli attempts to forcibly expel them in order to illegally annex the Valley and to colonize it with its settlers. With this project the Bank is not fighting poverty but the poor."

The Requesters also bring the human right of participation and the human right to water and sanitation to the attention of the World Bank, arguing that Palestinian civil society has not been adequately consulted and that the project locks in ongoing violations by Israel of the human right to water and sanitation rather than contributing to ending those violations.

Bret Thiele, Co-Executive Director of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights said "This case illustrates the connection between human rights and environmental justice. It's essential that the Jordan River alternative be fully explored, as existing studies have shown that that alternative could end both violations of the right to water and sanitation and environmental degradation. It's also crucial that the benefits of that alternative are made known to Palestinian civil society so that they can be fully informed during the consultation process."