



Attention:

Roberto Moncalvo
President
Coldiretti

Martino Cerantola
President
Coldiretti Veneto

Manuel Benincà
Responsible for the Environment
Coldiretti Veneto

Subject: Coldiretti sponsorship of Watec Italy

Dear Mr. Moncalvo, Mr. Cerantola and Mr. Benincà,

We are writing to you from the the Palestinian Farmers Union (PFU) , Palestinian Environmental NGO Network (PENGON), and 12 other Palestinian agricultural and environmental organizations and networks. It has come to our attention that from 21 to 23 September the Israeli Watec conference will take place at the Marghera multifunctional Pavilion in Venice, Italy.[1] Watec is an initiative aimed at promoting Israeli technology -in the water sector.

We understand that Coldiretti Veneto is among the sponsors of the event and Manuel Benincà, responsible for the environment for Coldiretti Veneto, will participate in the session on agriculture and water sustainability. We are writing to ask you to rethink your sponsorship and participation in the initiative and to withdraw your support from Watec.

In fact, a growing number of organizations and networks around the world are supporting the Palestinian call not to cooperate with the Israeli water industry because of its role in the grave violations of human rights and water rights that we detail below. Even public institutions are increasingly refraining from or cutting existing ties with Israel's main water company Mekorot. You can find more information at www.stopmekorot.org.

Participating companies at Watec include Tahal Group International, which builds wastewater treatment plants servicing Israeli settlements.[2] All Israeli settlements are illegal as they are built on occupied Palestinian land in violation of international law and are considered as such by the UN Security Council, the International Court of Justice and by all European institutions. Also participating is IOSight, which lists among its main customers the Israeli state water company Mekorot, known for its appropriation of Palestinian water resources and for supplying water to Israeli settlements, as well as Hagihon, involved in sewage treatment plants for the settlements.[3] These businesses play a fundamental role in the occupation and colonization of our lands. In fact, important international companies have withdrawn from or canceled cooperation agreements with these companies due to their involvement in international law violations.[4]



Waterc itself serves as a propaganda showcase for Israel, which is perhaps among the leading innovators in the water sector, but is certainly a leader in the denial of basic human rights to the detriment of our Palestinian communities. In fact, it is through the control of water resources that one of the most blatant violations of international law related to the illegal occupation of our territory manifests itself.

As Palestinian farmers and environmental organizations we are writing to urge you not to be complicit in this initiative, and we imagine your decision to participate was based on the fact that in your country there is not a great deal of information about the 'water apartheid' that the Israeli water technology and water management corporations develop and implement . We therefore assume you might not know that:

1. Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan Heights, the main source of water for the entire Middle East region, expelling almost all the Syrian inhabitants and replacing them with Israeli settlers. Israel has since taken actions to reserve the water resources of the area for the benefit of its population, excluding the other populations inside and outside the occupied Palestinian territories;
2. Israel has militarily occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, controlling, in particular, in the Jordan Valley the main source of surface water in the region for the benefit of its military bases and illegal settlements, denying the use to the occupied Palestinian population;
3. Israel transferred all Palestinian water infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza to Mekorot, its national water company, for the symbolic price of one shekel, and since then the company has managed the water system exclusively favoring Israeli citizens and illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. At the same time the Israeli military administration has imposed strict limitation on water usage by the occupied Palestinian population, requiring specific permits for the maintenance of wells and existing pipelines as well as for drilling or the construction of new facilities. These permits are routinely denied or granted with much delay if the application is submitted by Palestinian municipalities or individuals, while they are issued without problem for illegal settlements;
4. With the Oslo Accords, water management was to be regulated based on 1993 consumption rates for a limited time of five years, in anticipation of a final peace deal. While a maximum limit was imposed on Palestinian consumption, no such limit was placed on Israeli consumption. The final peace agreement was never signed, and in these 25 years the Palestinian population has almost doubled. The limits placed on the Palestinians have not been updated according to population growth, while the settlements have continued to expand and be regularly connected to water supplies. Israel currently uses about 80% of the water from the Mountain Aquifer, which is located almost entirely in Palestinian territory;
5. In addition to holding the Gaza Strip under siege since 2007, Israel has launched increasingly devastating military operations. Among the main targets of Israeli bombs were electric power plants and wastewater treatment plants. Sewage systems and wells and irrigation systems were also destroyed. Less than 6% of Palestinians in Gaza has potable water, which causes serious health problems with infections and diseases due to pollution of what little water is available. In addition, there is the risk that by 2020 the underground water reserves of the Gaza Strip will be depleted. Today, most of the water consumed in Gaza is sold by the



Israeli company Mekorot at prices that most of the population cannot afford. Roughly 1.2 million Palestinians in Gaza have no access to running water;

6. The construction of Israel's illegal apartheid wall, which does not follow the 1967 borders but seizes part of Palestinian territory, has separated many Palestinian communities from a number of goods and services. In addition to schools and hospitals, these communities have lost farmland and water wells, which were either destroyed or remained on the other side of the Wall, preventing access;

7. Since the Oslo Accords, Israeli settlement agriculture has become one of the principal means for the expropriation of new lands in the West Bank. In fact, for settlers, supported by the Israeli State, it is easier to take over our lands via agriculture, expanding the territory of an existing settlement, than it is to build a new one. Since 1997, settlements agriculture in the occupied West Bank has increased in area by 35%, while cultivated Palestinian land has decreased by one third. Stolen Palestinian water is used to irrigate the crops of the settlements built on stolen Palestinian land.[5]

Israel's control of water, together with the expropriation of land, is one of the main tools of the colonization project and the expulsion of the Palestinian population.

In 2009 the World Bank estimated that the damage inflicted on Palestinian agriculture in the West Bank due to lack of irrigation is significant, and could reach up to 10% of GDP and the loss of 110,000 jobs.[6] And since then the situation has only worsened. This summer in some areas of the West Bank, lack of water forced Palestinian farmers to kill or sell off their livestock and many crops were destroyed. As the Israeli journalist Amira Hass noted, in the nearby settlements, swimming pools were filled with water and plants and lawns were irrigated.[7]

Not only does Israel steal our land, but also the water needed to irrigate our fields and water our animals. Not only is there little water available to us, but it is also of poor quality and often not drinkable. According to the World Health Organization, acceptable levels of water consumption is 100 liters per day per person. On average, we Palestinians have 73 liters, Israelis (including in the illegal settlements) have 250 liters. This lack of access to water has led to the desertification of cultivated areas. At the same time intensive farming of Israeli settlements in the occupied Jordan Valley is leading to a significant increases in the consumption of water.

Data on water consumption and access is easily available online and provided by institutions and major international NGOs (UN, EU, World Bank, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, the Palestinian human rights organization Al Haq and the Israeli organization B'Tselem).[8]

As crop and livestock farmers, you can imagine what is happening to us and to our economy, where agriculture employs about 12% of the workforce. We are confident that, in light of the information, you will review your decision and deny the sponsorship and participation at the Venice conference, where some of the main actors responsible for this situation will be present.

We would greatly appreciate it if you could provide a response by 22 August.



SIGNATURES

Palestinian Farmers Union (PFU)
Arab Agroecologist Association
Environmental Education Center
Environmental Media Center
Jordan Valley Solidarity Campaign
Land Research Center
Land Defense Coalition
MA'AN Center for Development (MA'AN)
PENGON Friends of the Earth Palestine

Palestinian Agricultural Cooperatives Union (PACU)
Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC)
Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (Stop the Wall)
Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG)
Union of Agricultural Work Committee Union (UAWC)

Notes:

- [1] <http://www.watecitaly.com/>
[2] <http://www.whoprofits.org/company/tahal-group-international>
[3] <http://www.iosight.com/customers-2/>
<http://www.whoprofits.org/content/mekorot%E2%80%99s-involvement-israeli-occupation>
<http://www.whoprofits.org/company/hagihon-company>
[4] <https://www.royalhaskoningdhv.com/en-gb/news-room/news/20140114pr-explaining-terminate-wwtp-east-jerusalem/3339>
<http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/targets/european-union/766-al-haq-welcomes-decision-by-dutch-company-vitens-nv-to-terminate-its-collaboration-with-the-israeli-national-water-company-mekorot>
[5] <http://972mag.com/using-stolen-water-to-irrigate-stolen-land/120653/> <http://972mag.com/resource-how-agriculture-is-used-to-take-over-west-bank-land/84993/>
[6] <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/WaterRestrictionsReportJuly2009.pdf>
[7] <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.727212>
[8] https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_springs_report_march_2012_english.pdf
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<https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/12/19/separate-and-unequal/israels-discriminatory-treatment-palestinians-occupied>
<http://www.alhaq.org/publications/Water-For-One-People-Only.pdf>

Palestinian Farmers Union (PFU)



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<http://www.btselem.org/publications?tid=63>