

Legally Yours



By Ahmad J. Tahboub

Water Crimes

Summer is closing in. Whether you are planning to spend your vacation over the pool or simmering at a close by shore, you may want to think about the water situation in Jordan. What most people used to consider a government exaggeration, is now a sad reality. Jordan is listed amongst the globe's poorest countries when you consider water resources availability per capita. Compared with its neighbors in the region, Amman not only suffers from shortage in drinkable water, but the whole concept of "aqua within reach" barely exists.

National dams did not fulfill their annual expectations, and the many attempts of pulling water to Amman were aborted due to unfeasibility or high operational cost. In the wake of ill resources, governmental procedures target better water management. In a recent press release, Miyahuna (the capital's water operator) pledged to tighten the rope and send more teams in the field to inspect and seize violations. Whether in Amman or any other city, some ravage networks or fix residential connections to bypass water meter readings. It gets easier outside the Capital where water lines are out in the open, and offenders prefer to go straight to the source. These illegal acts are punished under Article 30 of the Water Authority Law which imposes fines from 100 – 1000 JOD and/or imprisonment from one to six months. These punishment tools do not exclude the Jordanian Water Authority ("WAJ") from claiming financial damages related to assault on water network or residential connections. It is bad enough to know that 70% of water pumped outside of Amman is unaccounted for or **STOLEN!!**

Offenses at the level of customers are common in Middle-Eastern countries, but what I find astonishing is the pre-meditated misuse of water resources, especially at the level of wells. In WAJ's corridors, many jokes were made about shooting a pipe line to drink, or digging a 70 meter deep well to provide water for a few heads of cattle. The old-new joke turned into a serious look on the bosses faces due to deterioration in Jordan's water reserves.

Apart from the repeated cries for water shortage, residential misuse of drinkable water is still an issue. For Muslims and Christians, safeguarding God's blessings is part of faith itself, yet the concept of saving water does not exist at the social level in Jordan.

We still see people hosing their cars during summer time and pouring considerable amounts of water down the street's drainage system. On the other hand, excessive irrigation of residential plantations and home gardens is also an issue. It is important that the ministry of Agriculture attend more campaigns to market climate-proper plants and dripping systems instead of the traditional 5 meter long plastic water pipe. The whole issue needs to be regulated and people who do not grasp the importance of saving water should be **reproached and fined**. In some European cities, it may cost you more than 5000 euros to wash a car with drinkable water!!

The Jordanian government is assessing the Jordan's Valley input and whether agriculture is something we want to have in Jordan OR NOT. This takes place at the official level, while there is lack of information and awareness at the community level. Official level, while there is lack of information and awareness at the community level. What started as chaotic uninformed actions by some farmers have developed into organized projects robbing water through intensively irrigated agricultural schemes. I used the terms "intensively & robbing", since projects owners did not consider Jordan's hot climate and went forth with planting high end products that needed more irrigation than globally required. It is adamant that Jordan's underground water is not a renewable source, and therefore massive consumption serves water poverty to the country's thirsty population. To top things up, agricultural products are not displayed in local markets but exported to other neighboring and European countries. While prices of vegetables and fruits have doubled or tripled, projects owners claim that exporting their products contribute to the country's GDP. If we agree that it is not pioneering or creative to plant watermelons, we can easily reach a conclusion that these production farms **SELL WATER NOT FOOD ...** or else: why would other countries let Jordanians plant, harvest and then put the high cost of air shipping till such products reach remote markets? And if you do not agree with this theory, can we at least agree to forgo this unique opportunity and **drink our water rather than sell it?**

Unauthorized usage of underwater in Jordan is a socio-economic crime causing strategic damage to the country's poor water reserves. When in war, you damage armed forces, while with massive water consumption you abolish a nation. **WATER CRIMES ARE WORSE THAN ... WAR CRIMES!!**

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