



REPORT by NotinOurNameTU

TU BERLIN: BEYOND COMPLICIT

Legitimizing Illegal Settlements and optimizing Water Apartheid





Summary

Between 2017 and 2021, the Technical University of Berlin coordinated the [MedWater](#) project under Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research's (BMBF, now BMFTR) [Water as a Global Resource](#) programme. The project focused on the Western Mountain Aquifer – the largest groundwater reservoir in historic Palestine, its recharge zone located primarily under the occupied West Bank. Officially, MedWater was presented as neutral research in accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goal of “water for all”. In practice, the project materially supported Israel's apartheid water regime and violated international and German law, using [1.8 million €](#) of public funds. This report documents the following key findings that showcase TU Berlin's active contribution as a German public institution to Israeli legitimization of illegal settlements and optimization of water apartheid.

Key Findings

Legitimizing Illegal Settlements

TU Berlin included **Ariel University** as a research partner. The university is located entirely within the **illegal settlement** of Ariel in the occupied West Bank, established on stolen Palestinian land. Cooperating with this institution thus violates [UN Security Council Resolution 2334](#), [EU research guidelines](#), and [Germany's own 2014 territorial clause](#).

Excluding Palestinians

While TU Berlin publicly claimed Palestinian inclusion, the project's [own final report](#) admits that planned subcontracts with the Palestinian Water Authority and other Palestinian institutions “could not be realized”. In practice, no Palestinian body participated and none received results.



Optimizing Water Apartheid

Mekorot, Israel's state water company is the [backbone](#) of the water apartheid system - and TU Berlin chose it as a [partner](#). The UN has [documented](#) Mekorot's discriminatory practices, such as cutting water supply to the neighbouring Palestinian village Kufr Al Deek to prioritize **Ariel settlement**. The project involved the development of a [decision support system](#) for regulating water extraction from the Western Mountain Aquifer. Built in close cooperation with Mekorot and the Israeli Hydrological Service, the DSS enabled users to simulate new wells and pumping rates, and forecast drawdown. It was tailored for Israeli servers and institutions, allowing only them to benefit from the outputs.

Instead of advancing equal access to water, MedWater created a tool to optimize Israel's extraction from an aquifer where Palestinians already receive less than [14%](#) of the supply.

Misuse of Public Funds

A total of 1.8 million € in funding was received from the BMBF, on a project that illegally cooperated with institutions located and active in illegally occupied territories and publicly lied about the involvement of Palestinian institutions.

Background

Water Apartheid

Directly after occupying the West Bank in 1967, Israel began controlling and restricting Palestinian access to water. Military orders transferred control of all water resources in the West Bank to the Israeli military authorities¹, and Palestinians have since been denied the right to drill new wells or even repair existing ones without permits - which are almost never granted². This stark discrimination has manifested in a system of apartheid. [Amnesty](#), [Alhaq](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [B'tselem](#), among many other NGOs all reported on this disparity.

On average, Israeli settlers consume **around 247 liters of water per person per day**, compared to **82 liters** for Palestinians connected to the water grid, and just **26 liters** for communities without network access – far below the **WHO minimum** of 100 liters.

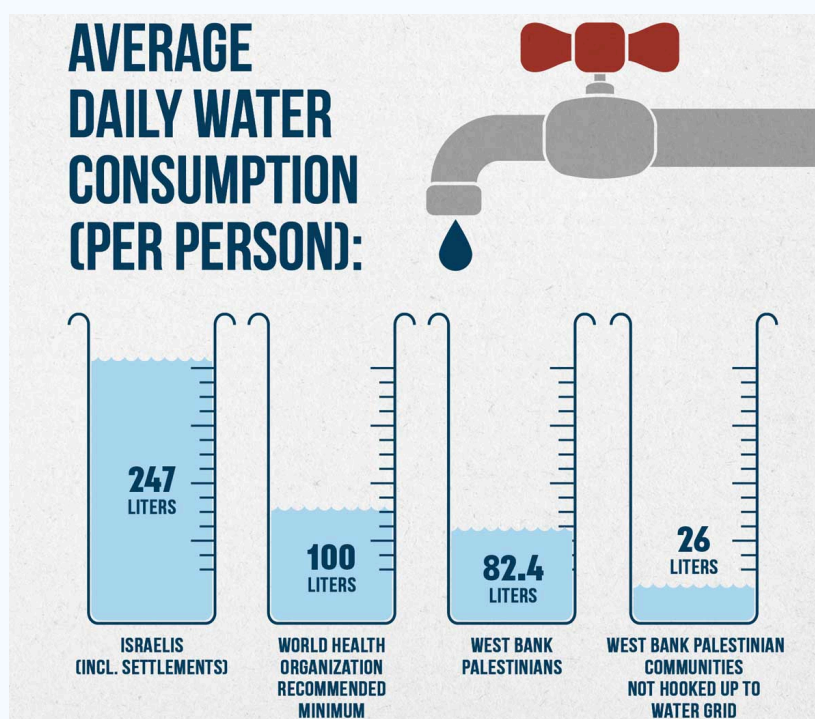


Figure 1: Average daily water consumption per person³.

¹ [Water Crisis | B'tselem](#)

² See p. 15, [Troubled Waters - Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water | Amnesty International](#)

³ [Parched: Israel's policy of water deprivation in the West Bank | B'tselem](#)

Mekorot, Israel's national water company, allocates and distributes water **unequally** under the direction of the Civil Administration, routinely **cutting supply** to Palestinian communities while maintaining uninterrupted flow to illegal settlements⁴.

The main shared water body, the **Mountain Aquifer**, illustrates this structural theft. Israel extracts roughly **86% of its total flow**, leaving Palestinians with only **14%**⁵.



Figure 2: The major aquifers in the west Bank⁶

⁴ Section IV, Part B, Point 7, No. 84 [UN A/HRC/22/63](#)

⁵ See PDF page 13 [How dispossession happens: the takeover of Palestinian water springs by Israeli settlers | March 2012 | UN OCHA Occupied Palestinian Territory](#)

⁶ [The major aquifers in the West Bank](#),



This aquifer includes the **Western Mountain Aquifer**, which provides much of the water used in central Israel and the surrounding settlements⁷. Its recharge area lies largely under the occupied West Bank⁸, making it both the main source of fresh water in historic Palestine and a central arena of Israel's system of control. Here, the massive inequalities between settlers and Palestinians are most visible: Deep wells drilled by Mekorot and settlement authorities tap directly into the shared aquifer, while Palestinian communities are denied the right to access or maintain their own resources. It is within this system of extraction and segregation, specifically on the Western Mountain Aquifer – the core of Israel's water apartheid – that the German-funded MedWater project⁹ was implemented.

The [Geneva Conventions](#) and their [Additional Protocols](#) establish key principles of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and property during armed conflict and occupation. Under these laws, an occupying power is considered a temporary administrator, not the sovereign authority, and is therefore prohibited from exploiting or appropriating the natural resources of the occupied territory for its own benefit. Such actions are regarded as violations of international law and may constitute pillage, which is expressly forbidden under [Article 33](#) of the Fourth Geneva Convention and [Article 47](#) of the Hague Regulations (1907). The occupier's responsibility is to preserve and manage the territory's assets for the welfare of the local population, not to extract profit or deplete resources for its own gain.

read more:

- [Water is a Human Right – but Israel has made it a Weapon \(2025\)](#)
- [Israel using water as weapon of war as Gaza supply plummets by 94%, creating deadly health catastrophe: Oxfam | Oxfam in Asia \(2024\)](#)
- [Parched: Israel's policy of water deprivation in the West Bank | B'Tselem \(2023\)](#)

⁷ [Palestine Water Fact Sheet #1 | Center for Economic and Social Rights](#)

⁸ See p. 9 [Inventory of Shared Water Resources in Western Asia | UN-ESCWA and BGR](#)

⁹ [Integriertes Wasserressourcenmanagement \(IWRM\) - MedWater | TU Berlin](#)

Not In Our Name TU, 17.11.2025

Report:

TU Berlin Between Legitimizing Illegal Settlements and Optimizing Water Apartheid



→ **The Occupation of Water - Amnesty International (2017)**

→ **Water for One People Only | Alhaq (2013)**



Partners

Ariel University

One of the project partners for MedWater is Ariel University, located inside the illegal Israeli settlement of Ariel, deep in the occupied West Bank. It is a key part of Israel's illegal occupation project. The settlement itself constitutes a well-documented case of land theft, established in 1978 through military expropriation and illegal state land declarations that excluded Palestinian ownership rights and denied access to privately owned farmland¹⁰. Consequentially, Palestinian academic bodies, including the Ministry of Education and the Council of University Presidents, alongside international organizations and even Israeli academic associations—such as the Israeli Anthropological Association, the European Association of Social Anthropologists, and over 1,000 Israeli academics—have all called for the non-recognition and academic boycott of Ariel University¹¹.



Figure 3: Ariel University's location¹²

¹⁰ See [Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank \(Part I\) | UN The Question of Palestine](#)

¹¹ See [Supporting the Palestinian call to end ties with Israeli academic institutions in illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land | No Academic Business As Usual With Ariel University](#)

¹² See [Guide for Journal Editorial Boards: Avoid Normalising Illegal Israeli Settlement-Based Ariel University – No Academic Business As Usual with Ariel University](#)



The illegality of the Ariel settlement is not ambiguous. In fact, it is confirmed at every level: by international law, as well as European and German regulations. At the international level, UN Security Council Resolution 2334 obliges states to distinguish between the territory of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967¹³. At the European level, Ariel University has been explicitly excluded¹⁴ from Horizon Europe projects to comply with European Union (EU) guidelines that prohibit funding institutions located in illegal settlements¹⁵. And at the German level, a territorial clause agreed upon by the Federal Foreign Office and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2014 stipulates that projects funded by the German government must only involve partners headquartered within Israel's pre-1967 borders¹⁶.

read more:

- [No Academic Business As Usual with Ariel University | noarielties.org/](https://noarielties.org/)
- [The European Union is legitimising Israel's illegal settlements say scholars - European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine](#)

Mekorot

In 1982 the West Bank water infrastructure controlled by the Israeli army was handed over to Mekorot, the Israeli national water company. Since then, Mekorot has operated some 42 wells in the West Bank, mainly in the Jordan Valley region, which supply the Israeli population – including those living in illegal settlements – while Palestinians could no longer drill new wells or rehabilitate or even just repair existing ones without permission from the Israeli occupation army. Such permits are almost systematically rejected¹⁷. As a result of continuous restrictions, and deep-water drillings by Mekorot, many Palestinian communities in the West Bank have no choice but to depend on the state water

¹³ See [Israel's Settlements Have No Legal Validity, Constitute Flagrant Violation of International Law, Security Council Reaffirms | UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases](#)

¹⁴ See [Parliamentary question | Answer for question E-001197/21 | E-001197/2021\(ASW\) | European Parliament](#)

¹⁵ [Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities \(2013/C 205/05\)](#)

¹⁶ See Territorial Clause section, [Israel | BMFTR](#)

¹⁷ See p. 15, [Troubled Waters - Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water | Amnesty International](#)



company¹⁸. The UN fact-finding mission of 2013 reported in the section IV (B), part 7 - Restrictions on the right to water, that “Palestinians do not have access to Israeli recycled water available to settlements, and have to use water from the more expensive drinking water supply for irrigation purposes. In the event of a water shortage, valves supplying Palestinian communities are closed; this does not happen for settlements”¹⁹. These policies translate directly into daily discrimination: Palestinians receive on average 80 liters of water per person per day, falling short of the 100 liters minimum recommended by the WHO²⁰, while Israeli settlers enjoy around 250 liters – three times as much. Mekorot’s control over water also extends into Gaza. Before October 2023, about 12 percent of Gaza’s entire water supply – more than half of all potable drinking water – came through Mekorot’s pipelines. This control made it possible for the Israeli government to impose a total cutoff²¹, reducing average availability to just 2–9 liters per person per day, falling below even the 15 liters emergency minimum²².

In 2023, Mekorot was officially listed in the UN updated settlement database²³, pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 31/36²⁴, as a company engaged in illegal activities in the occupied Palestinian territories—the so-called UN blacklist of firms with business ties to Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Mekorot was cited under categories (e) and (g), for providing essential services to settlements and for the exploitation of water, in violation of international humanitarian law. Beyond such general findings, the UN has also provided a specific example for the company’s practices in the 2014 A/HRC/25/38 report, section V - Access to land and water: in Kufr al-Deek, a Palestinian village near the settlement of Ariel, “when supplies of water are low in the summer months, Mekorot closes the valves that supply Kufr al-Deek so as not to affect Ariel’s water supply”

read more:

- [Israeli water company Mekorot under pressure from NGOs](#)
- [‘Get out Mekorot’: Behind the campaign resisting Israeli water colonialism in Argentina](#)

¹⁸ See Section IV, Part B, Point 7, No. 82, 83 [UN A/HRC/22/63](#)

¹⁹ Section IV, Part B, Point 7, No. 84 [UN A/HRC/22/63](#)

²⁰ See p. 8 [Human Rights Fact Sheet No. 35 - The Right to Water | UN OHCHR, UN HABITAT, WHO](#)

²¹ See [Extermination and Acts of Genocide: Israel Deliberately Depriving Palestinians in Gaza of Water | HRW](#)

²² Section 7.3 [Domestic water quantity, service level and health | WHO](#)

²³ See [Settlement Database Occupied Palestinian Territories | OHCHR](#)

²⁴ [UN A/HRC/RES/31/36](#)



Medwater Project

Funded 1.8 million € by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (now [BMFTR](#)) under the Global Resource Water ([GRoW](#)) programme, MedWater was supposed to contribute to the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goal 6](#): “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. Partners officially included Ariel University, Mekorot and the Palestinian Water Authority.

Partners		
Projekt coordination (TU Berlin)	National Partners	International Partners
- Project lead: Prof. Dr. Irina Engelhardt - Project management: Philipp Nussbaum, M.Sc. - Research assistants: Sandra Banusch, M.Sc., Paul Hepach, M.Sc., Sandra Matthäi, M.Sc.	- University of Göttingen - University of Bayreuth - University of Würzburg - VisDat geodatentechnologie GmbH - BAH Berlin - Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	- Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières, FR - Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole, FR - Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, IT - Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui Cambiamenti Climatici, IT - Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, IL - Hebrew University of Jerusalem, IL - Ariel University, IL - Hydrological Service Israel, IL - Mekorot Water Company Ltd., IL - Palestinian Water Authority, PS

Figure 3: MedWater Partners²⁵

In interviews with *Tagesspiegel* in 2019, TU Berlin **project coordinator** described MedWater as a scientific bridge between Israelis and Palestinians, insisting that “*water knows no borders*”²⁶. The core of the project was the development of a Decision Support System²⁷ for the Western Mountain Aquifer. It was designed to allow users to model setting new wells, pumping rates, and calculate drawdowns in the water resources²⁸.

The project coordinator told *Tagesspiegel* that because groundwater is considered a matter of national security, it was difficult to obtain reliable data on how much water was extracted by whom –

²⁵ [Integrated Water Resources Management \(IWRM\) - MedWater | TU Berlin](#)

²⁶ [Wasserknappheit in Israel: Kühlmittel für eine hitzige Region | Tagesspiegel](#)

²⁷ [Technical Notes DSS | Medwater](#)

²⁸ [Stakeholder Forum: Decision support systems to prevent water conflicts | BMBF](#)



but that was precisely the information her team needed. She explained that she had *“negotiated an agreement with both sides”* to secure access to the data and to ensure the publication of results. The data, she said, were *“stored on a TU Berlin server; even project partners must obtain permission before using them”*.

In the same interview, Engelhardt expressed optimism about cooperation, stating: *“All parties must come together and develop a joint management plan to solve the water problem collectively. Perhaps our model can provide the scientific foundation for that”*.

Findings

Despite the rhetoric of neutrality and cooperation, MedWater effectively functioned as a project of normalization. Far from bringing “both sides” together, the final report²⁹ shows that the project only strengthened Israel’s control over Palestinian water resources and legitimized institutions complicit in the occupation and the Apartheid system.

1. **Palestinian participation never materialized:**

The report states that “in comparison to the project proposal, subcontracts with the following institutions were *not realized*: Environmental Water Resources Engineering (EWRE), Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG), Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), and Hydro-Engineering Consultancy (HEC)”. They were still publicly listed as partners in the final conference³⁰, and the official website³¹.

2. **Israeli partners withheld promised data:**

“Many data promised by the Israeli partners could not be provided due to the political sensitivity of the issue”. These include information essential for groundwater modeling, but could also show the extent of inequality in extraction of the shared resources.

²⁹ See p.9 [MedWater Schlussbericht nach Nr. 3.2. BNBEst-BMBF98 | Medwater](#)

³⁰ [Stakeholder Forum: Decision support systems to prevent water conflicts | BMBF GRoW](#)

³¹ [Integrated Water Resources Management \(IWRM\) - MedWater | TU Berlin](#)



3. Results were not shared with palestinian institutions:

“The contracts within the framework of result transfer – with the University of Naples and the Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières (BRGM) – as well as with the Israeli water supplier MEKOROT Co. Ltd. were concluded as planned”. The report explicitly lists the Italian, French and Israeli institutions but no Palestinian ones.

Taken together, these admissions reveal that MedWater was never a joint scientific effort, but a project implemented entirely under Israeli control, excluding Palestinians from both participation and benefit from a project on water resources primarily located in the West Bank.

Legal Implications

International law

By partnering with Ariel University and Mekorot, the project violated international humanitarian law. UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) obliges all states to distinguish between Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Cooperation with entities operating inside the West Bank disregards that obligation and constitutes material support for the maintenance of an unlawful situation. The ICJ's 2024 advisory opinion confirmed that states must neither recognize nor assist such activities³².

European Guidelines

The EU Guidelines on the Eligibility of Israeli Entities and Their Activities in the Territories Occupied by Israel Since 1967 (2013/C 205/05) explicitly bar financing for institutions located in settlements³³. Ariel University has been explicitly excluded from Horizon Europe on this basis³⁴. Funding the collaboration with Mekorot and Ariel University through the public German money violates the spirit and stated objectives of the EU's external policy.

³² See section VII, Part B, points 274-279 [Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem | ICJ Advisory Opinion](#)

³³ [Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities \(2013/C 205/05\)](#)

³⁴ [Parliamentary question | Answer for question E-001197/21 | E-001197/2021\(ASW\) | European Parliament](#)



German law

The Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (LkSG) requires German enterprises to prevent contributing to human-rights abuses through their own activities as well as through activities carried out by other entities in their supply chain. Although TU Berlin is a public university, it falls within the scope of LkSG pursuant to § 1(1), which applies to “enterprises regardless of their legal form that have their central administration in Germany and have at least 1000 employees”³⁵.

For a public-law entity, such as TU Berlin, to qualify as an “enterprise” in terms of the LkSG, it is sufficient that the entity competes against other entities on the market by offering services or products. It is not necessary that the entity does business for profit³⁶. In Germany, access to universities is not regulated to be restricted by territory or to particular groups of people but universities compete against each other for students, partnerships and grants. TU Berlin thus qualifies as “enterprise” and must comply with the LkSG due diligence obligations.

TU Berlin has 7500 employees³⁷, and as outlined in the university contract (Hochschulvertrag), it competes for third-party research grants and enters contractual partnerships with industry and foreign institutions, which confirms that it does engage in economic activity³⁸. For these reasons, the TU Berlin qualifies as an “enterprise” within the scope of the Supply Chain Act.

TU Berlin’s actions may indicate non-compliance with the following provisions of the LkSG:

- §2(2), Nr. 10 prohibits unlawful taking of land, forests and waters in the acquisition, development or other use of land, forests and waters, the use of which secures the livelihood of a person. The project, handing over information and technology for water extraction and management to an Israeli company that enforces water apartheid, and in cooperation with an

³⁵ [Supply Chain Due Diligence Act](#)

³⁶ See page 33, [Drucksache 19/28649 | Bundestag](#)

³⁷ [Careers and Jobs | TU Berlin](#)

³⁸ See section IV, [Hochschulverträge | Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft, Gesundheit und Pflege](#)



institution built in an illegal settlement, all while excluding Palestinian institutions could potentially fall under this provision.

- §5 requires a documented risk analysis to identify the human rights risks at its direct suppliers. None was conducted sufficiently before working with Ariel University or Mekorot.

Furthermore, TU Berlin's cooperation with Ariel University violates the territorial clause established in 2014 by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which applies to German government-funded research. The clause states that:

"Projects (including partners in those projects) which receive funding from the German Government must have their headquarters in the geographical area that was already under the jurisdiction of the State of Israel before 5 June 1967."³⁹

³⁹ [Supporting the Palestinian call to end ties with Israeli academic institutions in illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land | No Academic Business As Usual With Ariel University](#)



Conclusion

The MedWater project exposes TU Berlin's material participation in systems of occupation and apartheid. By ignoring human rights obligations and breaching local and international laws, the university has transformed publicly funded research into a mechanism of complicity. TU Berlin cannot claim to uphold the rule of law or fair and ethical research as values while financing collaboration with entities that operate in, or derive benefit from, occupied Palestinian territory, and enforce apartheid there.

To meet its legal and ethical obligations, TU Berlin must:

1. **An independent investigation** must be initiated into the MedWater project, including all contracts, communications, and financial transfers.
2. The findings must be **disclosed publicly** and determine whether the project violated Germany's 2014 territorial clause and the Supply-Chain Act (LkSG).
3. **Terminate all existing cooperations** with Mekorot or Ariel University, and enforce the territorial clause that prohibits **any future partnerships** with entities located in or serving Israeli settlements.
4. **Establish binding human-rights and international-law compliance mechanisms** for all publicly funded research, including mandatory partner screening, transparency requirements, and sanctions for violations.