



Advocacy Brief: Protecting the Water Spring “Ein Faris” in Nahhalin – West of Bethlehem Governorate

The Western countryside of Bethlehem—comprising the villages of Battir, Husan, Nahhalin, al-Walaja, al-Jaba’a, and Wadi Fukin—constitutes a major source of agricultural food production and is home to numerous water springs, foremost among them Ein Faris. This spring is regarded as a vital resource for agriculture and drinking water, and as an integral part of the area’s environmental and social heritage. Nearly one third of the land in this region consists of agricultural land distributed across its principal villages, which has also made it one of the most important centers for eco-tourism and community-based tourism, owing to the availability of key attractions such as water springs, historical sites, and expansive green agricultural landscapes.

These springs are among the most important natural resources in these rural communities, and it form a main source for irrigating agricultural lands. The springs also contribute to strengthening food security while preserving the agricultural and traditional character of these areas.

In Husan, there are 21 springs (8 of which lie within the boundaries of settlements established on village lands), while Battir has 9 springs (2 of them within what is known as the Green Line), and Wadi Fukin has 7 springs, all of which are exposed to pollution and repeated encroachments. Nahhalin, for its part, contains 3 main springs. Among them, Ein Faris in Nahhalin stands out as a vital water resource that reflects the agricultural heritage and local identity of the population. However, this essential resource is subjected to multiple violations, including water pollution, restrictions on access to agricultural lands, and direct encroachments by settlements.¹

Despite the beauty of this landscape, the western countryside is subjected to a fierce and multifaceted campaign of Israeli settlement expansion. The western countryside and its villages are viewed as an obstacle to the “Greater Jerusalem” project. Accordingly, Israeli targeting of the villages of the western countryside takes multiple forms: some villages experience systematic demolition operations, while others are subjected to settler attacks that include land confiscation, destruction of crops, pollution of spring water, and denial of access to natural resources.

These practices constitute a clear violation of the principles of international humanitarian law and relevant United Nations resolutions, as well as an infringement of fundamental human rights, including the right to water, the right to food, and freedom of movement.

The ongoing violations against the villages of the western countryside, foremost among them Nahhalin, constitute a systematic attempt to dismantle the agricultural, environmental, and economic fabric of the Palestinian population and to forcibly displace them from their land without any alternative guarantees.

The residents, farmers, and women farmers of the western countryside confront Israeli displacement policies by continuing to work their lands, filing legal cases with the support of lawyers, participating in

¹ Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ)

the documentation of violations, and implementing local initiatives to protect agricultural lands and water springs, while emphasizing their need for international legal and human rights support.

This paper, based on direct field documentation, calls upon relevant stakeholders, locally and internationally, to protect Ein Faris, ensure farmers' right of access, and rehabilitate degraded lands, in order to safeguard the population's rights to water, food, and a clean environment.

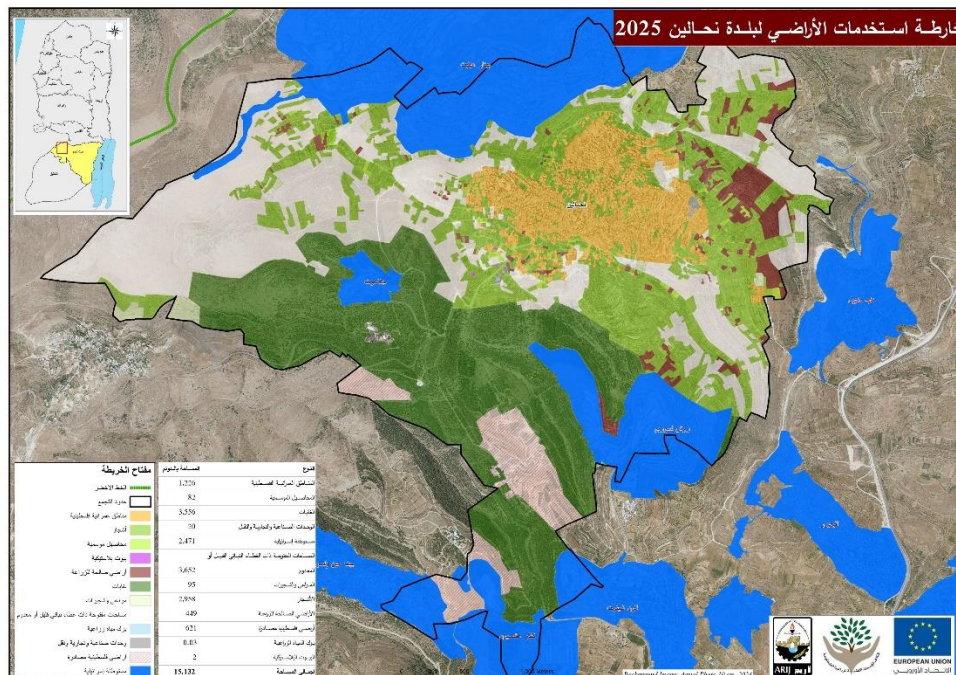
Background and Context: The Village of Nahhalin as a Case Study

The total area of Nahhalin village is 18,858 dunums, of which 890 dunums, approximately 2.9% of the village's total area, are designated as built-up urban land. The village population² is estimated at around 10,000 residents, including approximately 2,335 males and 2,223 females aged between 0 and 18 years. The population aged 18 and above numbers about 5,416, of whom 2,566 are males and 2,850 are females.

Available data indicate that approximately 4.3% of the population lives below the extreme poverty line, while the overall poverty rate stands at 11.5%. The unemployment rate is estimated at 11.8%.

The village suffers from Israeli occupation practices, including settlement expansion and land confiscation, as well as measures aimed at harassing and restricting the population. A total of 4,283 dunums of village land have been confiscated for the benefit of Israeli settlements and bypass roads, including 3,583 dunums allocated to settlements and 700 dunums for bypass roads.

The Israeli occupying authorities have established 6 to 8 illegal settlements on the lands of Nahhalin village, with a total area of 3,046 dunums and a population of approximately 80,947 settlers. These settlements include Beit Ein, Gevaot, Kfar Etzion, Beitar Illit, Rosh Tzurim, and Alon Shvut³. These settlements encircle the village's residents and prevent their demographic expansion. They also deliberately discharge wastewater toward agricultural lands, resulting in damage to extensive areas of farmland and causing direct harm to a historic water spring in the village known as Ein Faris.





Historically, the lands of Ein Faris constituted the main food basket for the residents of Nahhalin and neighboring villages. They were collectively managed and cultivated with summer and winter crops, as well as fruit-bearing trees such as olives, grapes, and apples⁴. The spring's water is considered a primary source for drinking, agriculture, and watering livestock. The surrounding lands cover approximately 300 to 500 dunums, which have been damaged as a result of the deliberate discharge of wastewater into them.

1- Current Status of the Spring

- **Water quantity:** The spring produces a limited amount of water, which is polluted and unsuitable for drinking or irrigation.
- **Access:** Access is difficult due to earth barriers and ongoing, systematic restrictions imposed by the occupying authorities.
- **Affected area:** Approximately 300 to 500 dunums.
- **Documentation:** Official and documented reports of access denial and attacks against farmers.

2- Israeli violations and its impact on the Spring

Although the spring continues to produce a limited quantity of water, its quality has deteriorated due to the discharge of wastewater from illegal Israeli settlements established on village lands. This has led to soil contamination, pollution of groundwater reservoirs, and increased soil salinity. Access to the spring has also become difficult as a result of restrictions and earth barriers. Official reports have documented cases of access denial and attacks against farmers, reflecting a decline in the community's ability to benefit from this vital resource.

These conditions provide the basis for understanding the nature of the violations affecting the spring and the direct impact they have had on its use and sustainability. In light of this deterioration, a number of violations affecting the spring directly can be identified, most notably:

First Violation: Water Pollution

Since the 1990s, wastewater from the Beitar Illit settlement has been discharged toward the lands surrounding the spring, turning the water into a polluted stream unfit for human or agricultural use. The surrounding lands, planted with olive and almond trees, were once considered a recreational area for the village's residents in addition to being a source of livelihood.

Settler attacks on agricultural lands continue, as settlers seek to reduce Palestinian expansion toward uncultivated lands and transform them into a colonial land reserve that can be easily controlled at any time. In response, the Nahhalin Municipality seeks to preserve the Ein Faris area due to its historical and agricultural significance by constructing drainage channels to remove wastewater, prevent it from reaching the spring, and divert it away from agricultural lands in order to avoid contamination.

⁴ Documentation and Testimonies of the villagers – ARIJ 2025



It should be noted that wastewater causes multiple forms of damage. Discharging it onto agricultural land leads to contamination of the groundwater aquifer through seepage and increases salinity levels, rendering the water unsuitable for use. It also raises soil salinity, resulting in clogged soil pores and loss of productivity, in addition to harmful environmental effects such as foul odors and the spread of diseases and insects.

Documented cases have recorded the discharge of wastewater from settlements onto Palestinian lands, as occurred in 2023, when reports indicated that settlers from the Beitar Illit settlement released sewage into agricultural lands in Nahhalin, causing soil and water contamination and damaging crops cultivated over dozens of dunums.

A 2024 report by the **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** confirmed that the discharge of wastewater from settlements onto Palestinian land poses a serious environmental and public health threat and adversely affects Palestinian food security⁵.

Meanwhile, a **2009 report by the Israeli human rights organization** noted that a significant portion of settlement wastewater is discharged untreated into valleys and Palestinian agricultural lands, threatening Palestinians' right to clean water, undermining their sovereignty over local food production, and endangering groundwater aquifers, which constitute an important source of water for both Palestinians and Israelis⁶.

Second Violation: Access Denial and Land Confiscation

Restrictions on Palestinian farmers' access to their lands have intensified as a result of land confiscations and earth barriers, with some farmers subjected to attacks by armed settlers. This has led to the disruption of olive harvesting, a decline in agricultural activity, and the erosion of farmers' ability to exercise their economic and social rights⁷.

In addition to field documentation, the Palestinian Studies Institute reported in its 2024 publication an increase in the construction of settlements, bypass roads, and outpost settlements since October 2023, along with the closure of dozens of roads that previously connected rural villages to one another or linked them to agricultural areas. These measures have further restricted the right of Palestinian farmers, both men and women, to access their land and natural resources⁸.

Negative Impact on the Local Community

Soil and agricultural water contamination, together with the inability to access farmland in the Ein Faris area, have led to a decline in agricultural production and damage to extensive areas of crops such as olives and vegetables. This has posed a direct threat to public health and increased the risks of diseases associated with contaminated water.

These practices have also contributed to the collapse of the local agricultural economy, as many families have lost their primary source of livelihood or been forced to reduce their agricultural

5 Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

6 Palestine Information Center

7 Apartheid Monitoring Website

8 Testimonies by the local community (From the field work)



activities. This, in turn, has led to higher poverty rates and increased dependence on employment outside the agricultural sector or consideration of migration.

Land seizure and the denial of access to cultivate land have eroded the historic relationship between the population and their land, a relationship that is fundamental to identity and community stability. The accumulation of wastewater, soil degradation, and groundwater contamination have further deepened environmental and health marginalization, undermining the population's right to a safe, healthy, and stable environment, as well as their right to food sovereignty.

The population has been affected overall, with Palestinian women farmers in particular suffering as a result of land and water contamination that has reduced agricultural production and household income.

Reports by the local council indicate that a large number of women who cultivated land or participated in agricultural work with their families have lost their source of income. Most of these women relied on selling agricultural produce, but today they and their families have no income as a result of land contamination and its unsuitability for cultivation due to wastewater flowing from the settlements.

Social, Economic, and Environmental Impact

- Decline in agricultural production and crop losses, increased poverty, and reliance by some families on employment outside the agricultural sector or consideration of migration.
- Loss of income for women linked to agricultural activities due to land and water contamination.
- Environmental degradation and heightened health risks, including contamination of groundwater and soil.
- Erosion of the resilience of rural communities and the undermining of the historic relationship between the population and their land, which is an integral part of community identity.

Testimonies by the Local Community

Palestinian Farmers:

Umm Mousa Fahima Issa Ghayatha, a Palestinian woman farmer from Nahhalin:

“Ein Faris has been our land for generations. We used to grow wheat and snake cucumber (Faqqus) there. Today, reaching the spring has become difficult, but it will remain ours despite them, whether they accept it or not.”

Mohammad Khaled Fanoun, a Palestinian farmer from the area:

“I cultivate a plot of land with eggplant and squash in the summer, and onions and radishes in the winter. But getting down to the spring has become a struggle because of the occupation. Sometimes we manage to go once a week, and other times we cannot irrigate more than once or twice a month.”



Members of the Local Council/Municipality:**Naeem Ahmad Najjara, Acting Mayor of Nahhalin:**

“We are going through a very difficult period due to residents being deprived of access to their lands and of harvesting olives and grapes. Anyone who enters the area risks arrest. The settlement’s wastewater treatment facility discharges sewage toward the Wadi of Ein Faris, leading to contamination of the soil and water.”

Engineer Ali Ghayatha, an agricultural expert from the village:

“If the source of pollution is stopped, the lands of Ein Faris can be rehabilitated by washing the soil, re-plowing it, and exposing it to sunlight. The core problem is the continued discharge of wastewater from the settlements toward the village lands.”

Local Community and Partner Organizations:

The Applied Research Institute, Jerusalem (ARIJ), has been working for years to document environmental violations in the western countryside. Through field visits, we have observed a clear deterioration in soil and water quality in the Ein Faris area. Women in the village repeatedly express their suffering after losing their agricultural source of income and emphasize their urgent need for legal and technical support to rehabilitate the land and ensure safe access to it.

The report author noted that “documenting the ongoing violations against Ein Faris reveals the extent of their impact on the production of farmers, both men and women, and on their rights to access water and land.” ARIJ further explained that “Ein Faris constitutes a living example of Israeli violations against Palestinian natural resources, as these springs are subjected to direct attacks by occupation forces and settlers, particularly given the presence of six illegal settlements surrounding the spring.” It also pointed out that settlers from Beitar Illit discharge wastewater toward the spring, polluting the water and negatively affecting agricultural lands, thereby harming Palestinian women and men farmers. ARIJ affirmed that these violations represent a clear breach of international conventions and human rights, and called upon the international and local community to work toward protecting Ein Faris and ensuring Palestinians’ right to utilize their natural resources in order to strengthen their resilience on their land and safeguard their food sovereignty.

Procedures to be taken:

To protect the rights of Palestinian citizens, compliance with national and international rights and conventions must be ensured, including the right to clean water, the right to food, and the right to a healthy environment, as stipulated in the Fourth Geneva Convention, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11, and the United Nations declarations on the rights to water and food. The international community must exert pressure to ensure the protection of Ein Faris and the restoration of its role as a primary water and agricultural resource for the community, thereby guaranteeing the population’s right to access water, strengthening food sovereignty, and safeguarding the livelihoods of women and men farmers. All necessary measures must also be taken to protect all other water sources, ensuring that they do not suffer the same pollution and repeated settlement-related attacks experienced by Ein Faris. International water law affirms that access to sufficient, safe, and



affordable water is a fundamental human right, closely linked to the right to health, the right to food, and the right to a clean environment. This makes the protection and preservation of water resources a duty of states and the international community in order to uphold human dignity and ensure food and environmental security.

Proposed Aspirations of the Local Community⁹:

1. International and local legal protection for the spring, and an end to settlement-related offenses.
2. Ensuring farmers' freedom of access and their ability to exercise their agricultural rights.
3. Rehabilitation of damaged lands and improvement of soil quality.
4. Institutional and legal support from local and international organizations to ensure ongoing documentation and advocacy.
5. Preservation of the historical and environmental heritage of Ein Faris as a sustainable natural resource.
6. Strengthening media solidarity to highlight the suffering of rural villages and affected farmers.

Call to Decision-Makers and the International Community

We call upon governmental bodies, international institutions, human rights and environmental organizations, and the media to protect vital natural resources and to guarantee the rights of the Palestinian community to water, food, a healthy environment, and community resilience.

This document has been produced with the support of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and therefore do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

⁹ Views of Village Residents in an Opinion Survey Conducted by ARJ