

# *Israel floods Palestinian farmlands in Gaza Strip*

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**General view of flooded Palestinian farmlands in the Gaza Strip after Israeli forces opened up the gates of nearby rainwater storages. (Photo: Twitter)**

Gaza City, February 20 (RHC)-- Large swaths of farmland in the besieged Gaza Strip have been flooded after Israeli officials deliberately emptied out nearby rainwater storages, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage to agricultural areas in the impoverished Palestinian enclave.

Farmers east of Zeitoun and Shajayeh districts of Gaza City told official Palestinian Wafa news agency that agricultural crops were completely destroyed on more than 500 dunmas (123.5 acres) of flooded

land. They argued that Israeli authorities open up the gates of nearby rainwater storages only a few days before harvest season, effectively flooding Gaza crops and causing a great deal of losses.

Meanwhile, a group of Palestinian non-governmental organizations has condemned Israel over flooding Palestinian-owned farmlands in the Gaza Strip. "We hold the Israeli regime fully responsible for the direct and indirect damage inflicted on Gaza and its residents" the group said in a statement.

"We call on the international community as well as humanitarian and human rights organizations to intervene immediately to prevent Israeli attacks on [Palestinian] farmers and their lands, to protect them and to ensure that the occupiers do not repeat their aggression," the NGOs said.

The Palestinian group also called for an international mechanism in order to compensate Gaza farmers, especially as agricultural products are the main food basket of people in the Strip. The NGOs argued that Israeli authorities intentionally open up the gates of dams and rainwater storages, damaging agricultural crops, infrastructure and various facilities in the Palestinian territory.

The agricultural lands in the Israeli-imposed "buffer zone" near the separation barrier constitute a source of livelihood for hundreds of Palestinian families and serve as Gaza's main source of fruits and vegetables.

The flooding comes amid other measures Palestinians say are being deliberately applied by Israeli forces to affect the impoverished besieged territory's food supply and push farmers off their lands. It is estimated that that Israeli practices, such as flooding, the leveling of lands by army vehicles, and the spraying of chemical herbicides, have cost Palestinian farmers in the Gaza Strip hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The Israeli army regularly claims that herbicides are used to clear vegetation in the buffer zone on the Gaza side of the border fence in order to have a clearer view of the area for military purposes. But Palestinians say the policy inflicts wide-ranging damage on residents of Gaza.

"The chemicals and herbicides they spray not only damage the farmlands, they also have catastrophic consequences if people eat the sprayed crops," Aref Shamali, a farmer, said.

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