

Introduction

Jerusalem Water Undertaking is located in the Ramallah District of the Palestinian Territories. This district includes one major urban area, the twin cities of Ramallah / El-Bireh, and about 100 villages, municipalities and refugee camps. The region that obtains its water services from the Jerusalem Water Undertaking includes the Ramallah / El-Bireh cities, four other municipalities, 40 villages and 5 refugee camps. (The remaining villages in the Ramallah District that are not served by JWU are either provided with water by the Israeli Civil Administration or not yet served). The served area extends over 500 square kilometers and includes over 25,000 connections serving a population of over 200,000 people.

HISTORICAL REVIEW

Until the later 1950s, the population of Ramallah and El-Bireh depended almost entirely on cisterns for drinking water with the exception of a few local springs. Following the war of 1948 and the resulting influx of Palestinian refugees into the area, the need to increase the water supply in the region became vital. Thus the Ramallah / El-Bireh Water Company was established to deal with this burden and supply water to the area. The new company planned to draw on Ein-Fara Springs northeast of Jerusalem and succeeded in concluding an agreement with Arab east Jerusalem Municipality.

A distribution network and a main pipeline were constructed for the purpose of conveying water from Jerusalem to the Ramallah / El-Bireh area. The limited quantities of water were insufficient for the population of these communities and search for new water sources is necessary.

In 1963, the Jordanian government concluded an agreement with the International Development Agency (IDA) for a loan of \$3.5 millions to develop drinking water projects in parts of the Kingdom. The government decided to utilize the underground water at Ein-Samia and started to build what later became known as the Ein-Samia Water Project.

Pursuant to the agreement made between the Jordanian government and IDA, a law was issued in 1966 for the establishment of the Jerusalem Water Undertaking (Ramallah District) with authority to develop new water resources and control all water projects in the area and with the responsibility of providing the population with potable water. According to this law, the JWU was established as a non-profit, independent, civil organization run by a Board of Directors which includes representatives from the three main municipalities in the area.

Since the occupation in 1967, the Israeli authorities subjected all works and projects pertaining to water and water resources to its direct supervision or control through the military order No. 92/1967. The said order prevented any organization or undertaking from the execution of any work connected with the running, management, maintenance or development of water services or resources without the prior approval and licensing from the Israeli military authorities.

Furthermore, in 1982 the Israeli occupation authorities dissolved the city councils of Ramallah and El-Bireh thus disabling the JWU Board of Directors that consists of two members from each city from performing its duties. For five years and without the Board of Directors, the general manager took it on his part to make all the daily and strategic decisions to achieve the Undertaking's goals and proceed with its strategic plans.

At the end of 1987, the Intifada started in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The whole political, social and financial situation in the area changed. Many people became out of work thus putting extra burden on the Undertaking as far as collecting water fees from the consumers. Even through these tough days of Intifada, the Undertaking managed to survive and even came out stronger than ever.