

Thursday July 27th, 2017

Logos of Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, Eshkol Regional Council, Hof Ashkelon Regional Council, Sdot Negev Regional Council, Sderot

To:

**Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Minister of Defense, MK Avigdor Liberman**

The Environmental and Sanitary Disaster Unfolding in the Gaza Border Area

We have recently been informed that following the debt of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority, the State of Israel has decided to significantly reduce the supply of electricity to the Gaza Strip. This has resulted in the almost complete closure of the sewage treatment facilities in Gaza. In the absence of treatment within the Strip, the sewage flows into the territory of the State of Israel - the water reservoirs in the area of the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council, the southern shores of Israel, the drainage basins and the rivers of the entire region.

We, the heads of the local councils around the Gaza border area, wish to express our firm reservation about the situation we are facing against our will. There are serious health and environmental consequences that are expected to affect our area and significantly endanger our residents and the residents of the entire region of southern Israel. This creates an absurd situation in which the State of Israel invests enormous political and financial resources in protecting the lives of our residents while 90,000 cubic meters of sewage from Gaza flows into the region's water system. As a result of this situation, the desalination plant in Ashkelon has been impacted, which is responsible for the supply of one-fifth of the drinking water of the citizens of the State of Israel.

We wish to remind you that just last year, the head of Military Intelligence, Major-General Hartzvi Halevy, warned the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that the Gaza Strip is likely to go through a complete humanitarian collapse and become uninhabitable by 2020. In addition, in the last State Comptroller's report, which focused on the pollution from Gaza among other topics, the State Comptroller noted that despite the warnings about the danger of outbreaks of disease in the Gaza Strip, no proper risk

assessment has been carried out on the issue or on the risk of harming the environment and the water infrastructure due to the flow of sewage from the Gaza Strip to Israel, even before the reduction of electricity supply to the Gaza Strip, which is certainly accelerating the process.

We, as heads of municipalities surrounding the Gaza Strip, are well aware of the complexity of the Gaza issue and all its implications, and we are certain that a range of strategic considerations were on your mind when the decision was made. Clearly, Hamas is a bitter enemy and must be dealt with harshly. The Palestinian Authority's refusal to pay for electricity is problematic as well, but despite all this, it is an internal Palestinian conflict whose victims are the residents of the Gaza Strip. We must do everything in our power to prevent the possibility that this conflict will directly harm the residents of the Gaza border area and the southern communities of Israel. This issue could be as serious as the security threats we have faced in the past 15 years.

We are on the verge of a health crisis that does not take into account political borders. The Gaza border area area is undergoing economic recovery. The quiet of the past three years allowed impressive demographic growth, the construction of new schools, the strengthening of agriculture in the region, quality of life and a strong sense of security. Without a fundamental and long-term solution to the health crisis knocking on our door, we will face, in addition to the threats of tunnels and missiles, diseases, sea and coastal pollution, pollution of drinking water and pollution of agricultural water in the area. Prevention is better than a cure and the sooner we act the better.

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