

Barak Talmor, Arava Institute, “Jumpstarting Hope in Gaza”, 1/9/2025

Introduction

Hello, and thank you for joining today’s *Eyes on Gaza* gathering. The situation in Gaza continues to worsen. Alongside the mass killing of civilians, the systematic and deliberate starvation, and the unimaginable destruction, the army is intensifying its bombings and aggressive assaults. These meetings are not easy. It is hard to face annihilation and ruin directly. Yet there are times when our gatherings also bring direction for action and reminders of the many ways to disrupt, refuse, and resist systematic genocide. One name has often surfaced in such discussions: the Arava Institute. Based between the Jordan and the sea, and reaching further, the institute promotes environmental cooperation to build a sustainable future for all of us here. It was mentioned in Seba Abudaqa’s lecture from *Clean Shelter*, in Prof. Roni Strier’s talk on starvation in Gaza, and in our meeting with Nimer from Gaza, a graduate of the Arava Institute. Today, we are pleased to host Barak Talmor, also a graduate of the Arava Institute and an activist. He co-founded “Jumpstarting Hope and Gaza,” a project that provides drinking water and sanitation on the principle that we cannot wait for “the day after,” and that life-saving infrastructures must be built now. Barak coordinates the project and will speak with us about it today. Thank you, Barak.

Lecture

Thank you, Lior. It is a source of pride to hear that the Arava Institute has been mentioned in your gatherings. Thank you for inviting us to share our work in Gaza. For those unfamiliar: the Arava Institute is a research and academic center at Kibbutz Ketura in the Arava. Its guiding principle is that environmental challenges in our region are shared by all of us—Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians—and must be tackled together. But it is not only about solving these challenges. The joint work itself builds partnerships between Israelis and Palestinians where none existed before. And there is no greater proof of this methodology’s success than the project I will describe today: “Jumpstarting Hope and Gaza.” The project is led by the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies with our Palestinian partners, Damour for Community Development, an organization we have worked with since 2018 on environmental projects. Based in Ramallah and Gaza, Damour was our natural partner when the war broke out on October 7, bringing with it catastrophic humanitarian conditions. In March 2024, our two organizations launched “Jumpstarting Hope and Gaza” to respond.

As Lior said, we realized early—long before we imagined the war and disaster in Gaza would last this long—that the population could not wait for infrastructure until the end of the fighting. What was needed were not minimal services, but the very basics of life itself. With the Arava Institute’s expertise in decentralized water systems, sanitation, and energy systems, we set out to apply solutions originally developed for off-grid communities inside the refugee camps that Damour established in Al-Mawasi. The project is structured in three stages. Sadly, we are still at the first stage: meeting immediate survival needs. The second stage involves sustainable solutions—resilient not only environmentally but socially. I will show some of these here. The third stage looks to the interim period between the current devastation and eventual reconstruction. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Gazans will need interim solutions, and we propose our model as one.

Since the war began, we have supported five camps with some 20,000 displaced people. Today we work with one camp housing about 15,000 persons. Our aid has included hygiene kits, water systems, tents, winter clothing, sanitation equipment, water reservoirs, toilets—everything our local team reports as necessary. On this slide, you can see part of the list of equipment and aid we have delivered over the past 18 months, from food to water and shelter. Our main focus has been energy, water, sanitation, and camp infrastructure.

In March 2025, six months ago, when the siege intensified and food shortages worsened, we launched food operations—hot meal distributions and family food baskets. We supported 670 families with food packs and community kitchens that served more than 60,000 hot meals. In recent months, our focus has shifted back to water. All summer we have been sending daily water trucks to the camp. As the camps expand—sadly, with the occupation of Gaza, more refugees and displaced people arrive—we work constantly to build infrastructure and meet humanitarian standards: drinking water, toilets and sanitation facilities, solar-powered reservoirs for pumping water for domestic use not only drinking water.

Some of the solutions we are now introducing are designed to be sustainable, allowing the camp to produce them independently. These include *WaterGen* systems—machines that generate drinking water from air humidity—scheduled to be installed next week in hospitals. We are also deploying mobile desalination systems in the camps. For sanitation, we are using *Laguna Innovation*, a system developed at the Arava Institute to treat sewage. Many of you may know *HomeBioGas*. Energy solutions include microgrids and hypergrids, providing electricity to camps, and eventually, replacing tents with medium- and long-term shelters.

Let me conclude with this: our first goal is to deliver life-saving aid inside Gaza. But beyond that, we began this project in early 2024, at a time when no one wanted to discuss humanitarian aid for Gaza. We were the first Israeli organization in the field, and the first public Israeli-Palestinian partnership addressing it. It was essential to keep our partnership public—even though it is difficult for an Israeli organization to work inside Gaza, and even more so for a Palestinian organization to work with an Israeli partner. We wanted to show—and I hope we have shown—that even in an unbearable and unimaginable situation, it is possible to sustain such a partnership, and perhaps inspire others to do the same.