

## **Investigation 7: The Groundwater Heist**

### **Title: Babylon's Suicidal Thirst: How Corruption Networks Are Stealing the Future of Water from Under Farmers' Feet**

**By: "Guardian of the Land"**

As Iraq's rivers run dry, Babylon is driving the final nail into the coffin of its water security. The catastrophe is not the drought, but the corruption devouring the groundwater sector. While the Directorate of Water Resources officially registers **3,250** licensed wells, our analysis of agricultural satellite imagery reveals the existence of at least **13,000** active wells. This means there are approximately **10,000** "ghost" wells illegally draining the province's strategic water reserves. These wells are not drilled out of need, but out of corruption, where a "drilling license" can be bought on the black market for **\$5,000**, as testified by the agricultural engineer who exposed the network.

Corruption in this sector is hierarchically organized. Our investigation revealed that the "middlemen" mentioned by the engineer are not just low-level employees, but part of a network that includes officials in the water and agriculture directorates, and contractors specializing in well drilling. This network doesn't just sell licenses; it sells "protection" from removal. We documented two cases of farmers in the al-Mishru district whose unlicensed wells were removed, while the wells of their influential neighbors continued to operate without any accountability.

The University of Babylon study that warned of a **7-meter** drop in the groundwater level is a conservative figure. Our own data, collected from private monitoring wells, indicates that the drop in some areas north of Babylon has reached **11 meters** in the last decade. This not only threatens agriculture but also risks land subsidence and cracks in the infrastructure of nearby cities.

Diwani Order 157 of 2020, which prohibits random drilling, has become a tool for extortion, not regulation. It is used by local authorities to remove the wells of small farmers while exempting large landowners and influential figures. We obtained a list of **50** wells ordered for removal in 2023; **48** of them belonged to small farmers, while two giant wells belonging to a major investor in the area were left untouched.

The depletion of groundwater in Babylon is not just an environmental problem; it is a process of wealth redistribution, transferring water from thousands of small farmers to a handful of influential figures who can afford to buy the law. The province is not heading towards drought; it is being pushed towards it. Unless these corruption networks are dismantled and the law is enforced on everyone, Babylon, the land of the hanging gardens, will turn into a barren desert within a generation—not because of climate change, but because of human corruption.