



United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC)

Topic B: Measures to guarantee universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation

Introduction:

Water is an indispensable resource for sustaining human life, playing a pivotal role in various physiological and biological functions. It is not only essential for hydration, nutrient transport, and the proper functioning of vital organs, but is also intricately linked to the realization of human rights. The United Nations (UN) recognizes the right to water as a fundamental human right, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that everyone has access to sufficient, safe, and affordable water.

Beyond mere survival, access to clean water is connected to a broader spectrum of human rights, including the right to life, health, and an adequate standard of living. In parallel, sanitation is equally vital for human well-being; adequate sanitation facilities, encompassing proper waste disposal and access to hygienic conditions, are crucial components in safeguarding public health.

Sanitation prevents the spread of waterborne diseases, preserving the physical integrity and well-being of communities. Recognizing the intrinsic link between sanitation and human rights, the UN has also underscored the right to sanitation as an integral part of the right to an adequate standard of living. In ensuring access to safe and dignified sanitation facilities, societies uphold the principles of human dignity, health, and environmental sustainability.

The provision of sanitation services is not only a matter of practicality, but a commitment to fostering conditions where individuals can live with the dignity and security they are entitled to under human rights frameworks. Therefore, the interconnected nature of water and sanitation underscores their collective significance in the realization of basic human rights.

The Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6): 'Ensure access to water and sanitation for all', stands as a pivotal global commitment aimed at ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Encompassing access to clean water and adequate sanitation, SDG 6 recognizes the fundamental role these necessities play in supporting human life, health, and dignity. This goal seeks to address the pressing challenges of water scarcity, inadequate sanitation facilities, and the unequal distribution of these resources. It sets ambitious targets for improving





water quality, increasing water-use efficiency, and expanding access to sanitation services, especially in vulnerable communities.

By focusing on the sustainable use and management of water resources, SDG 6 not only aims to alleviate the burden of waterborne diseases but also contributes to broader objectives such as environmental sustainability and poverty reduction. Through international collaboration and concerted efforts, SDG 6 strives to build a future where everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographical location, enjoys the basic human right to clean water and sanitation, fostering healthier, more resilient, and equitable societies.

Concepts and definitions:

- **Adequate standard of living:** the right of all human beings throughout their life cycle to have access to the essential resources for subsistence.
- **Dignity:** the inherent value and worth of every human being, deserving of respect and protection.
- **Human rights frameworks:** established principles and agreements that recognize and protect the inherent rights and freedoms of individuals considering a legally, politically, and morally binding set of principles for governments.
- **Hydration:** the process of providing adequate fluids to the body to maintain health and well-being.
- **Sanitation:** the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human waste and the maintenance of hygienic conditions to prevent the spread of diseases. Conditions relating to public health, especially the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sewage disposal.
- **Waterborne diseases:** illnesses caused by microscopic organisms, like viruses and bacteria, that are ingested through contaminated water or by meeting feces.

Current issue:

The global water and sanitation crisis is not a one-size-fits-all challenge; rather, it manifests differently in each region. In America, issues such as water contamination and inadequate infrastructure disproportionately impact vulnerable communities. Meanwhile, Africa faces a complex situation with factors like population growth and inadequate sanitation facilities contributing to the widespread challenge. Tailored,





region-specific strategies are crucial, considering diverse factors such as geography, culture, and socioeconomics.

Collaborative efforts involving governments, NGOs, and local communities are essential to implement sustainable solutions that address the unique challenges faced by each region. Recognition of contextual disparities is paramount for developing comprehensive and effective approaches to ensure universal access to clean water and sanitation, aligning with human rights principles and Sustainable Development Goal 6.

In many regions across Africa, the absence of adequate infrastructure poses significant obstacles to water supply and sanitation. Rural areas often lack access to reliable and safe water sources, compounding the challenges faced by communities. In these areas, sanitation facilities may be insufficient, leading to increased health risks and hindering overall development. Addressing these infrastructure gaps requires targeted efforts to improve accessibility and sustainability, recognizing the unique needs of diverse communities.

Certain communities in America confront pressing challenges linked to water contamination. Factors such as industrial pollution, agricultural runoff, inadequate wastewater treatment, and aging water infrastructure contribute to the problem. In some instances, contaminants like lead, arsenic, or industrial chemicals pose direct health risks to residents. Mitigating these issues involves not only addressing immediate contamination concerns but also implementing long-term strategies for upgrading infrastructure and adopting environmentally responsible practices to safeguard water quality.

Inadequate infrastructure, particularly when we talk about developing countries, poses a significant barrier to access. Many communities lack proper water supply and sanitation facilities, leading to health risks and the spread of waterborne diseases.

In some communities worldwide there is a gap in awareness regarding the importance of safe hygiene practices and understanding of waterborne diseases. Education plays a pivotal role in promoting behavioral changes that lead to improved water and sanitation practices. Awareness campaigns, community outreach, and educational initiatives are crucial components of fostering a culture of hygiene, ensuring that individuals have the knowledge and tools to maintain clean and healthy living conditions.

Gender disparities play a significant role in exacerbating the global water and sanitation crisis, perpetuating inequalities that impact women and girls disproportionately. In many societies, traditional gender roles assign the responsibility of water collection and sanitation duties to women and girls, diverting their time and energy away from education, economic activities, and personal development. Clear





examples of these inequalities can be seen at a regional level, for example, in some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, where women and girls are often burdened with the arduous tasks of walking long distances to fetch water, exposing them to safety risks and hindering their overall well-being.

Furthermore, inadequate sanitation facilities, such as the absence of separate toilets for girls in schools, often lead to increased absenteeism and dropout rates. In South Asia, cultural norms and taboos surrounding menstruation contribute to a lack of access to clean and private sanitation facilities for women.

In addition, the existence of conflicts in the Middle East, exacerbates gender disparities in access to water and sanitation, with women facing heightened vulnerabilities in displacement settings. Addressing the water and sanitation crisis requires not only infrastructure improvements but also concerted efforts to challenge and reshape ingrained gender norms and promote inclusivity worldwide.

Despite great progress, billions of people still lack access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene. Achieving universal coverage by 2030 will require a substantial increase in current global progress rates: six times for drinking water, five times for sanitation, and three times for hygiene. Water use efficiency has increased by 9%, but water stress and scarcity remain concerns in many parts of the world. In 2020, 2.4 billion people were living in countries experiencing water scarcity.

These challenges are compounded by conflict and climate change. Key strategies to address SDG 6 include increasing investment and capacity building across the sector, promoting innovation and evidence-based action, improving coordination and cross-sectoral cooperation among all stakeholders, and adopting a more integrated and holistic approach to water management. Only 0.5% of the Earth's water is usable and accessible freshwater. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C instead of 2°C would roughly halve the proportion of the world's population expected to suffer water shortages, although there is considerable variability between regions.

International initiatives:

- **Global Water Partnership (GWP):** The Global Water Partnership stands as a collaborative network comprising more than 3000 water-related organizations dedicated to advocating for the effective, efficient, and sustainable management of global water resources. This inclusive network welcomes a diverse range of entities engaged in water resources management, including professional associations, research institutions, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, and more.





The GWP operates as a platform for fostering cooperation and sharing knowledge, aiming to address the complex challenges associated with water management on a global scale. By bringing together a multitude of stakeholders, the GWP plays a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue, promoting best practices, and catalyzing coordinated efforts towards the responsible and equitable use of water resources. Through its open and collaborative approach, the GWP strives to create a unified front in the pursuit of sustainable water management practices that benefit communities and ecosystems worldwide.

- **Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council:** It is an online collaboration and knowledge sharing platform developed by the CEO Water Mandate for both water sustainability and climate resilience. The HUB aims to help organizations in effectively managing water risk, promoting sustainable water practices, and enhancing overall resilience by:
 - a. Raising awareness about sustainability projects around the world and their administering organizations
 - b. Allowing the organizations to suggest new projects and build new interests between potential allies.
 - c. Facilitating new partnerships and collective action.
- **2030 Water Resources Group:** The 2030 Water Resources Group operates as a multi-stakeholder initiative hosted by the World Bank Group, functioning as a public, private, and civil society multi-donor trust fund. Its overarching goal is to facilitate collective decision-making and co-design solutions that contribute to robust socio-economic development across various sectors related to water issues.

By bringing together diverse stakeholders, including public entities, private enterprises, and civil society organizations, this group endeavors to foster collaborative approaches in addressing water challenges. Through its multi-donor trust fund framework, the 2030 Water Resources Group plays a crucial role in supporting initiatives that promote sustainable water management, aligning with broader socio-economic development objectives. The emphasis on collective engagement underscores the importance of coordinated efforts to achieve impactful and inclusive outcomes in the realm of water resource management.

Guiding questions:

1. What is your delegation's status regarding the global water crisis?





2. Which specific challenges related to sanitation and waterborne diseases exist in your delegation?
3. How is your delegation engaging in international collaborations or partnerships to address water and sanitation challenges, and what benefits or challenges have emerged from such partnerships?
4. How is your delegation addressing challenges related to wastewater management and the treatment of sewage?
5. Is water quality monitored, and if so, what measures are in place to ensure safe drinking water sources in your delegation?
6. Are there any emerging contaminants of concern in your delegation?
7. How does your delegation consider gender perspectives in water and sanitation policies, and what efforts are made to ensure that the burden on water collection and sanitation responsibilities is distributed equally?

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