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United Nations General Assembly Resolution – The Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation (2015)

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Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2015

[on the report of the Third Committee (A/70/489/Add.2)]

70/169. The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 64/292 of 28 July 2010, in which it recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights, and 68/157 of 18 December 2013, entitled “The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation”,

Reaffirming the previous resolutions of the Human Rights Council regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, inter alia, Council resolutions 24/18 of 27 September 2013¹ and 27/7 of 25 September 2014,²

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,³ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,⁴ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,⁴ the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁵ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,⁶ the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁷ and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁸

Welcoming the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁹ including the reaffirmation of commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation therein,

¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 53A (A/68/53/Add.1)*, chap. III.

² *Ibid.*, *Sixty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 53A* and corrigenda (A/69/53/Add.1 and Corr.1 and 2), chap. IV, sect. A.

³ Resolution 217 A (III).

⁴ See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

⁵ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 660, No. 9464.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2515, No. 44910.

⁹ Resolution 70/1.



Recalling the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of June 1992¹⁰ and its resolution 66/288 of 27 July 2012, entitled “The future we want”, and emphasizing the critical importance of water and sanitation within the three dimensions of sustainable development,

Reaffirming its resolutions 58/217 of 23 December 2003, by which it proclaimed the period from 2005 to 2015 the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”, 61/192 of 20 December 2006, by which it established 2008 as the International Year for Sanitation, and 65/153 of 20 December 2010, by which it called upon Member States to support “Sustainable sanitation: the five-year drive to 2015”, and recalling its resolution 65/154 of 20 December 2010, by which it declared 2013 the International Year of Water Cooperation,

Recalling the designation of 19 November as World Toilet Day, in the context of Sanitation for All, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/291 of 24 July 2013, in which the Assembly encouraged all Member States, as well as the organizations of the United Nations system and international organizations and other stakeholders, to approach the sanitation issue in a much broader context and to encompass all its aspects, including hygiene promotion, the provision of basic sanitation services, sewerage and wastewater treatment and reuse in the context of integrated water management,

Taking note of the relevant commitments and initiatives promoting the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, including the Panama Declaration, adopted at the third Latin American Sanitation Conference, in 2013, the Kathmandu Declaration, adopted at the fifth South Asian Conference on Sanitation, in 2013, the 2015 Dushanbe Declaration of the High-level International Conference on the Implementation of the International Decade for Action “Water for Life”, 2005–2015, the commitments made on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation at the high-level meeting of the Sanitation and Water for All partnership in 2014 and the Ngor Declaration on Sanitation and Hygiene, adopted at the fourth AfricaSan Conference, in 2015,

Recalling general comment No. 15 (2002) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the right to water (articles 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)¹¹ and the statement on the right to sanitation of the Committee of 19 November 2010,¹² as well as the reports of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation,

Welcoming the work of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund in the 2015 update published by their Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation,¹³

Welcoming also the fact that, according to Joint Monitoring Programme reports of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund, the target on safe drinking water of the Millennium Development Goals was formally met,

¹⁰ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex I.

¹¹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 2 (E/2003/22)*, annex IV.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2011, *Supplement No. 2 (E/2011/22)*, annex VI.

¹³ World Health Organization/United Nations Children’s Fund, *Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water*, Geneva, 2015.

while being deeply concerned, however, that, according to the 2015 Joint Monitoring Programme update, 663 million people still lack access to improved drinking water sources and that 8 out of 10 people still without improved drinking water sources live in rural areas,

Deeply concerned that the world missed the sanitation component of Millennium Development Goal 7 by almost 700 million people and that more than 2.4 billion people still do not have access to improved sanitation facilities, including more than 946 million people who still practise open defecation, which is one of the clearest manifestations of poverty and extreme poverty,

Deeply concerned also that women and girls often face particular barriers in accessing water and sanitation and that they shoulder the main burden of collecting household water in many parts of the world, restricting their time for other activities, such as education and leisure, or for women earning a livelihood,

Deeply concerned further that the lack of access to adequate water and sanitation services, including for menstrual hygiene management, especially in schools, contributes to reinforcing the widespread stigma associated with menstruation, negatively affecting gender equality and women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights, including the right to education,

Deeply concerned that women and girls are particularly at risk and exposed to attacks, sexual and gender-based violence, harassment and other threats to their safety while collecting household water and when accessing sanitation facilities outside of their homes or practising open defecation,

Deeply alarmed that, every year, almost 700,000 children under 5 years of age die as a result of water and sanitation-related diseases, and underscoring that progress on reducing child mortality, morbidity and stunting is linked to children's and women's access to safe drinking water and sanitation,

Deeply concerned that official figures do not fully capture the dimensions of drinking water availability, safety, affordability of services and safe management of excreta and wastewater, as well as of inequality and discrimination in the access to safe drinking water and sanitation and therefore underestimate the numbers of those without access to safe and affordable drinking water and safely managed and affordable sanitation, and highlighting in this context the need to adequately monitor the safety of drinking water and sanitation in order to obtain data that capture those dimensions,

Deeply concerned also that inexistent or inadequate sanitation facilities as well as serious deficiencies in water management and wastewater treatment can negatively affect water provision and sustainable access to safe drinking water, and recognizing that, in progressively realizing the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation as well as other human rights, States should increasingly pursue integrated approaches and strengthen their water resource management, including by improving their wastewater treatment and by preventing and reducing surface and groundwater pollution,

Affirming the importance of regional and international technical cooperation, where appropriate, as a means to promote the progressive realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, without any prejudice to questions of international water law, including international watercourse law,

Reaffirming the responsibility of States to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights, which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated,

and must be treated globally, in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis,

Recalling the understanding by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation that the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are closely related, but have distinct features which warrant their separate treatment in order to address specific challenges in their implementation and that sanitation too often remains neglected if not addressed as a separate right, while being a component of the right to an adequate standard of living,

Recalling also that the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and are inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as to the right to life and human dignity,

Acknowledging the importance of equal access to safe drinking water and sanitation as an integral component of the realization of all human rights,

1. *Affirms* that the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation as components of the right to an adequate standard of living are essential for the full enjoyment of the right to life and all human rights;

2. *Recognizes* that the human right to safe drinking water entitles everyone, without discrimination, to have access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use, and that the human right to sanitation entitles everyone, without discrimination, to have physical and affordable access to sanitation, in all spheres of life, that is safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable and that provides privacy and ensures dignity, while reaffirming that both rights are components of the right to an adequate standard of living;

3. *Welcomes* Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁹ on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, which includes important dimensions related to the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation;

4. *Also welcomes* the work of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, and takes note with appreciation, in particular, of his first reports on affordability of water and sanitation services¹⁴ and on the analysis of the different types of water and sanitation services from the perspective of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation;¹⁵

5. *Calls upon* States:

(a) To ensure the progressive realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation for all in a non-discriminatory manner while eliminating inequalities in access, including for individuals belonging to groups at risk and to marginalized groups, on the grounds of race, gender, age, disability, ethnicity, culture, religion and national or social origin or on any other grounds, with a view to progressively eliminating inequalities based on factors such as rural-urban disparities, residence in a slum, income levels and other relevant considerations;

¹⁴ [A/HRC/30/39](#).

¹⁵ [A/70/203](#).

(b) To give due consideration to the commitments regarding the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation when implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through the full implementation of Goal 6;

(c) To continuously monitor and regularly analyse the status of the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation;

(d) To identify patterns of failure to respect, protect or fulfil the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation for all persons without discrimination and to address their structural causes in policymaking and budgeting within a broader framework, while undertaking holistic planning aimed at achieving sustainable universal access, including in instances where the private sector, donors and non-governmental organizations are involved in service provision;

(e) To promote both women's leadership and their full, effective and equal participation in decision-making on water and sanitation management and to ensure that a gender-based approach is adopted in relation to water and sanitation programmes, including measures, inter alia, to reduce the time spent by women and girls in collecting household water, in order to address the negative impact of inadequate water and sanitation services on the access of girls to education and to protect women and girls from being physically threatened or assaulted, including from sexual violence, while collecting household water and when accessing sanitation facilities outside of their home or practising open defecation;

(f) To progressively eliminate open defecation by adopting policies to increase access to sanitation, including for individuals belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups;

(g) To approach the sanitation issue in a much broader context, taking into account the need to pursue integrated approaches;

(h) To consult and coordinate with local communities and other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, on adequate solutions to ensure sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation;

(i) To provide for effective accountability mechanisms for all water and sanitation service providers to ensure that they respect human rights and do not cause human rights violations or abuses;

6. *Calls upon* non-State actors, including business enterprises, both transnational and others, to comply with their responsibility to respect human rights, including the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, including by cooperating with State investigations into allegations of abuses of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and by progressively engaging with States to detect and remedy abuses of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation;

7. *Invites* regional and international organizations to complement efforts by States to progressively realize the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation;

8. *Calls upon* Member States to enhance global partnerships for sustainable development as a means to achieve and sustain the Goal and the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and highlights the need to develop adequate follow-up and review of progress on the 2030 Agenda, including on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;

9. *Reaffirms* that States have the primary responsibility to ensure the full realization of all human rights and to endeavour to take steps, individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical

cooperation, to the maximum of their available resources, with a view to progressively achieving the full realization of the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation by all appropriate means, including, in particular, the adoption of legislative measures;

10. *Stresses* the important role of the international cooperation and technical assistance provided by States, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and international and development partners, as well as by donor agencies, and urges development partners to adopt a human rights-based approach when designing and implementing development programmes in support of national initiatives and plans of action related to the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation;

11. *Decides* to continue its consideration of the question at its seventy-second session.

*80th plenary meeting
17 December 2015*
