

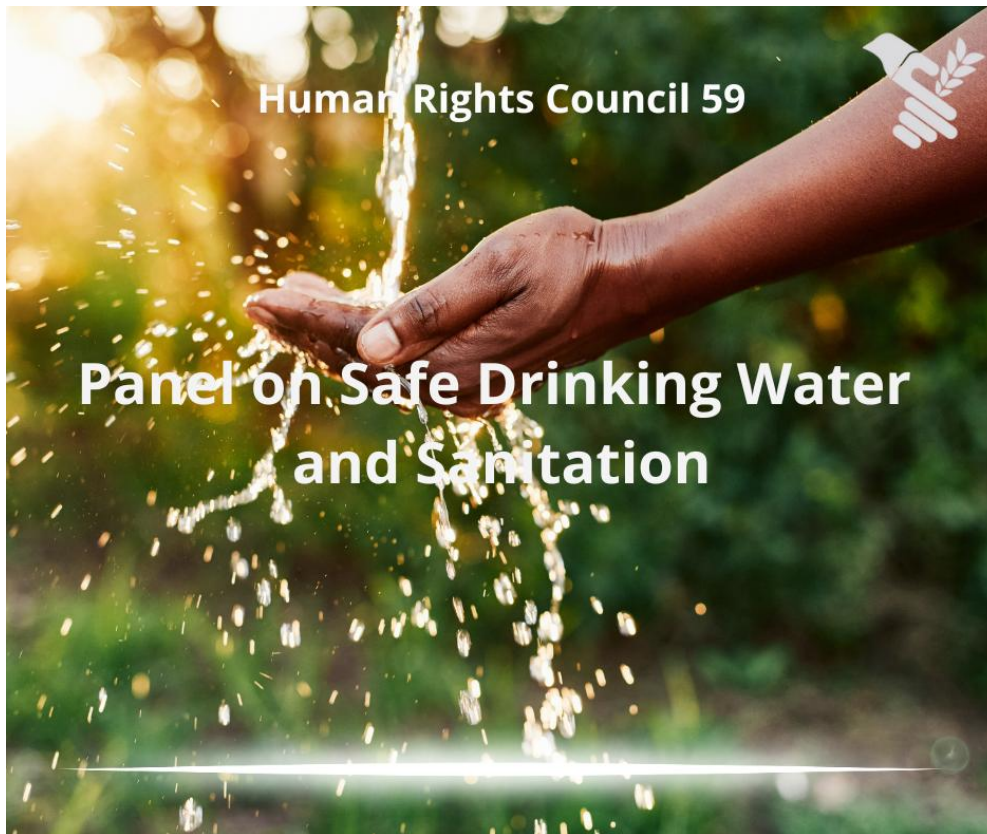


GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

## UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### Panel Discussion on the Realization of the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

#HRC59 • 26 June 2025



#### OPENING REMARKS

**H.E. Ms. Nada AL-NASHIF, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**

There is nothing more fundamental than water and yet over two billion people in the world lack access to safe drinking water and some 3.4 billion people around the world lack access to adequate sanitation. It is quite simply **a matter of life or death**. Some 1.4 million people die each year from infectious diseases caused by unsafe drinking water and sanitation including cholera, diarrhoea and typhoid. The disparities between countries are also alarming. Death rates due to the lack of clean water and sanitation are in some cases almost 500 times higher in low income countries than in developed countries. This is a **massive public health crisis** which does not get the attention or the resources that it requires. In conflicts around the world from Ukraine to Gaza to Sudan and beyond, warring parties are bombing water and sanitation infrastructure and blocking the delivery of clean water, turning water into a weapon of war.

The **climate emergency** is also having a serious impact on the availability of clean water and sanitation. Droughts are becoming more frequent and are lasting longer. Hurricanes are also destroying water and sanitation installations. Some developing countries are drowning in debt leaving them unable to invest in the required water infrastructure and in some developed



countries people's water and wastewater bills are soaring making it much harder for people to make ends meet.

These human rights challenges are immense and have particularly **devastating implications for some people and some groups**. For example, across regions toilets are not always accessible to people with disabilities. As water resources shrink women and girls face greater risks and longer distances for example to get water and to access a toilet exposes them to violence and health hazards. Where schools lack clean water and sanitation girls who are menstruating for example are often forced to stay home and miss class therefore having to make a choice between their education and their physical well-being. Indigenous peoples and people living in urban slums are often more exposed to contaminated water resources and more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme climate events. **Human rights provide a pathway for solutions**. The 2026 UN Water Conference is an opportunity to galvanise political will and to place rights at the centre of water governance. Three principles that can help steer us in the right direction.

First, governments need to **uphold their human rights commitments**. This includes investing in access to water and sanitation for all without discrimination. Everyone has the right to a sufficient safe physically accessible and affordable water of acceptable quality for personal and for domestic use. Governments also need to be transparent and accountable about the way they manage water resources. Such approaches build trust between people and their representatives helping to create more stable and secure societies for all.

Second, the people most affected by lack of access to water and sanitation must **be part of discussions** about managing water resources and ecosystems. Their insights from lived experiences, the obstacles they face and the solutions they propose are invaluable. We must also protect those human rights defenders who so courageously promote those rights.

Finally, governments at all levels **need to work together** as well as with the private sector, with international organisations, with civil society and others. Businesses should remain mindful of their responsibilities under the United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights because cooperation is crucial to accelerate progress to meet sustainable development goals six by 2030. One critical area for international efforts is reforming the outdated and dysfunctional international financial architecture. This must include tackling the excessive cost of debt and helping countries prioritise investment in water and sanitation.

OHCHR is doing its part supporting countries to develop **inclusive participatory approaches to water management**. For instance, in Guatemala, OHCHR organised workshops with Indigenous women to inform them about their rights and the international standards, thus enabling their contribution to discussions on a new water law. In Guinea, OHCHR helped integrate the rights to water and sanitation into the design of local development plans in several communes.

**Water is a public good, not a commodity**. Water management policies must recognise its crucial place as a fundamental right of every human being. Simply put, without access to water, the rights to life, to health, food, work and a healthy environment are all in jeopardy. The international community shall seize the momentum of the UN Water Conference to move forward together to shape a future where access to clean water and sanitation is a reality for all everywhere.



## STATEMENTS BY PANELLISTS

### **Mr. Pedro ARROJO-AGUDO, Special Rapporteur (SR) on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation**

Particularly grateful for the double mandate bestowed upon him by the UNHRC, the SR highlights two genuine challenges which he tried to grapple with in the framework of the 2023 Water Conference – first, ensuring that the human rights dimension is appropriately reflected in the agenda and outcomes of the conference, and secondly, promoting a widespread and inclusive representation of civil society in the Conference. The SR notes **bittersweet outcomes**, confessing his dissatisfaction with the achievements.

The SR positively notes that the organizers managed to overcome doubts and even mistrust around social movements with regard to the organisation of the Conference by the United Nations. Recalling the Water Conference held in Argentina almost a half a century before, the SR notes with concern that since then, the **business sector moved into the space** that the United Nations left free, organising, for example, the World Water Forum. This is why, it is essential that member states of the United Nations **shoulder the responsibility of leadership** and called the Conference of Water for 2023.

Another achievement of the Conference is the participation of some hundreds of representatives of social movements, NGOs, Indigenous organisations, community leaders from all of the continents. It was an enormous effort to get visas for them and to cover travel and accommodation expenses. But when they arrived, they not only found that they did not have a single representative among the panellists in the five interactive dialogues, they also found that they could not even get in to the plenary sessions. They had no seat and they had to remain outside. Furthermore, they hardly managed to get the term human rights in any of those interactive dialogues. The term barely appeared.

Looking forward to 2026, we must prove ourselves capable of doing better. With the support of the UNHRC this year, the SR trusts that the **2026 Water Conference** can focus its attention on the thousands, on the millions of people, the billions of people who are rights holders and they are rights holders specifically of the right to drinking water and sanitation and they are criminalised and persecuted when they dare to claim those rights. Hoping that there will be open up spaces to participate so that those rights holders can really listen to and participate in the dialogue and cooperation with Indigenous peoples and social movements.

Expressing his gratitude for the open and collaborative attitude encountered in Senegal and the UAE as co-sponsors of the conference, the SR explains that a **large social platform** has been set up encompassing representatives of Indigenous organisations from across all of the regions, the most significant NGOs, social movements and local and community institutional networks from across all of the continents. This is a wide-ranging, diverse and powerful representation of rights holders fighting the world over for compliance with SDG 6. In general, **women are at the forefront of this fight**.

With regard to the **institutionalisation of water**, the SR draws a comparison between water management and pandemics. If the World Health Organisation did not exist, those calling for periodic debates on potential pandemics such as COVID-19 and other public health risks would



be the pharmaceutical lobby companies instead of the WHO. This is what is happening with water management. The United Nations cannot continue to set its responsibilities aside on the essential issue of **water management**, leaving it in the hands of private companies. This is not criticism of private companies, but rather a call. This is the most urgent call for us to shoulder our responsibility as the United Nations.

The 2023 Conference gave rise to hope among social movements defending water and the rivers. It remains to be seen if this Conference alongside 2026 and 2028 will be the end of a good faith initiative or the beginning of the path towards commitment and responsibility by the United Nations in the face of the global water crisis in the middle of the long shadows being generated by climate change. It is vital that we make efforts around the four goals.

First of all, **institutionalising the Water Conference** under the leadership of the United Nations. Secondly, make that conference a space for listening, dialogue and collaboration with the rights holders, with the defenders of water rights and of the rivers, with women at the forefront, working and fighting on a daily basis for their rights and for compliance with SDG 6, which should mean that they should at least have one voice, one representative in each of the interactive dialogues. Thirdly, open up the space in the conference to local municipalities and authorities who are those responsible for providing water and sanitation services.

Finally, ensure that the **human rights dimension in water and sanitation** is included in interactive dialogues and the outcome documents of the conference on the basis of listening to the voice of those who have been silenced. The SR stresses that those who are experiencing such difficult problems as not having drinking water in their house, they can be right about everything that they say, but if we really want to understand these problems and progress towards a solution, we must listen to what they are saying because it is those people who know best the challenges they experience on a daily basis.

**H.E. Mr. Jamal Jama AL-MUSHARAKH, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva**

The Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) extends his sincere appreciation to the UNHRC for placing the human rights to water and sanitation at the centre of this session's agenda. He further warmly welcomes the relevant UNHRC resolution adopted in 2024 which called for this panel discussion in the lead-up to the 2026 UN Water Conference. Throughout this process, it is crucial to reaffirm the centrality of SDG 6 within the 2030 Agenda. Jointly with Senegal, the UAE is proud to co-host the 2026 UN Water Conference with the aim of accelerating the implementation of SDG 6 on ensuring the **availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation** for all.

For the Emirates, SDG 6 goes far beyond a single goal. It is the **bedrock of the entire 2030 Agenda** and essential to the achievement of all the other SDGs. This builds on the consensus reached 15 years ago when the UNGA adopted in 2010 Resolution 64/292 recognising the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. Acknowledging that the human rights to water and sanitation are not just critical entitlements, the Ambassador of the UAE emphasizes that these rights are essential for life, human dignity and sustainable development.



In this context, the figures mentioned in the Deputy High Commissioner's opening remarks are very telling and shocking. For instance, touching upon the issue of water collection, women and girls collectively spend **200 million hours each day collecting water**. Nearly 4 billion people are facing severe water scarcity at least one month a year - a crisis further exacerbated by climate change. These realities demand bold action putting at the centre the most marginalised, namely women, children, Indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities.

The **UAE has been a longstanding champion for expanding access to clean water**, both domestically and globally. In the UAE, upholding the fundamental right to have access to safe water and sanitation is a national priority. According to UN reports, the UAE has achieved an average of 100% in providing safe drinking water and sanitation services domestically. The UAE Water Strategy for 2036 aims to ensure sustainable and continuous access to water resources even during emergencies.

Globally, the UAE has led major efforts to expand access to clean water and sanitation around the world. The **Zaire dwells** continue to serve more than 50 million people daily, and the **UAE Water Aid Foundation** established in 2015 has provided access to clean water for approximately 15 million people across 37 countries. Anchoring **humanitarian efforts in Gaza**, there are six UAE-constructed water stations that produce two million gallons per day, supporting one million Palestinians as part of the UAE's total assistance to the Palestinian people. The UAE is also leading a transparent, inclusive and consultative process on the road to the Water Conference.

Building on these efforts, as a co-host jointly with Senegal, the UAE is firmly committed to integrating human rights throughout the entire process, from the preparations to the outcomes. Since May 2024, the UAE and Senegal have led **inclusive, consultative and transparent processes** with stakeholders across governments, international organisations, civil society, private sector and academia, while ensuring the meaningful participation of women, youth and Indigenous peoples. The co-hosts engaged across major platforms, including the 10th World Water Forum, UNGA79, the Cairo Water Week, COP29, UNCCD, COP16 and UN-related water meetings.

Touching upon some **milestones**, since the beginning of 2025 the UAE has sharpened its focus on shaping the themes of the six interactive dialogues, which will serve as the **core pillars of the Conference**. At the organisational session held in March, the first mandated meeting of the preparatory process, 72 participants, including 26 stakeholders, shared their recommendations on the themes of the interactive dialogues. Over 4,000 people tuned into this conversation. This was followed by a month-long online consultation, which generated 495 submissions from stakeholders across 87 countries, of which 42.8% coming from women and 20% from youth.

The proposed **themes of the six interactive dialogues** for the 2026 UN Water Conference were issued last week and place the human rights to water and sanitation at the heart of the conference. Drawing on these insights, an updated proposal for the themes of the interactive dialogues was issued on 16 June 2025 shall be adopted at the high-level meeting convened by the President of the UNGA on 9 July. These proposals build on the themes of the 2023 UN Water Conference, reflect the mandate of the 2026 Conference and are grounded in SDG 6. Collectively, the themes span the full spectrum of global priorities well-known as the **five Ps**, namely **people, prosperity, planet, peace, and partnerships**. Notably, the proposed theme for



one of the interactive dialogues is **water for people**, especially for those in vulnerable situations, water for healthy societies and economies. This dialogue intends to place human rights at the heart of the conference, reinforce a people-centred approach, and ensure dedicated attention to the vulnerable and modernised communities. The forward-looking message the Conference intends to convey is to encourage collective action on the road to 2026, starting with the 9 July high-level meeting. Looking forward to pursuing the collaboration with all partners in the collective journey to the 2026 UN Water Conference, the co-hosts hope to turn this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity into a world's milestone.

**Mr. Ndongo NIANG BA, Minister-Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Senegal to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva**

The delegation of Senegal commends the UNHRC for convening this panel at a particularly strategic juncture on the international agenda. The access to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right intrinsically linked to dignity, health, and social justice. It is also a fundamental pillar of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 6, whose implementation, unfortunately, has **not yet reached the height of our collective ambitions**. Therefore, it is essential, more than ever, to accelerate the implementation globally, in particular when it comes to vulnerable populations. It is well-known that the right to water and sanitation is inscribed in our international understanding of human rights. Despite being an essential component of economic, social, and cultural rights, throughout the world **2.2 billion people are still deprived** of this essential right.

Senegal reaffirms its robust and unwavering commitment to tackle this essential question of equality and social justice. This commitment is grounded in Senegal's diplomatic tradition of promoting human rights, but also the political vision of the President of the Republic of Senegal, who made water a priority of the national transformation agenda, **Senegal Horizon 2050**. This vision makes equal access to water and sanitation a lever of resilience, territorial development, and reducing inequality.

Senegal strongly believes that access to water and sanitation is a **fundamental right, not a privilege**. For this reason, the state has taken concrete action in addition to ensuring the creation of social mechanisms which ensure that the most vulnerable are treated fairly. In the urban sector, Senegal for several years has had a **welfare tariff for water**, which allows low-income households to enjoy lower rates for the first cubic metres of water they use. This policy has also been complemented by a programme designed for **connecting low-income households to water**. More than one million households have been able to benefit from these measures, which shows Senegal's genuine commitment to equality in access to essential services.

In rural areas, Senegal has engaged on ambitious reforms of public services for drinking water, aiming to ensure a more professional management, accountability, and a sustained provision under the motto **'one household, one tap'**. The aim is to ensure that all rural populations have access to water at affordable rates. With regard to sanitation in rural areas, Senegal has launched a sanitation programme which is piloted by communities. The aim is to provide them with improved equipment and sustainable sanitation facilities. Having an impact on millions of country residents, this approach has called on **community mobilisation**, making use of **education on hygiene** as well as technical assistance and subsidies.



As a co-organiser of the 2026 UN Water Conference jointly with the UAE, Senegal has elevated to one of the highest priorities the incorporation of human rights into all preparatory processes. The conference will be a turning point in the common ambition to **put water at the centre of public policy and multilateral partnerships**. With regard to the first interactive dialogue, the topic proposed in the concept note for the 2026 Water Conference will be ‘Water for people’. This shows the willingness to place human rights, particularly those of the most vulnerable, at the very centre of global actions and discussions.

The Ambassador of Senegal further announces that the preparations for the 2026 UN Water Conference have come to an **important turning point**. On 9 July, there will be a formal meeting convened by the President of the UNGA in New York with the goal of agreeing upon the themes for the six interactive dialogues. Senegal calls all states and non-state actors to support this process with the aim of setting ambitious and inclusive topics for discussion, which will be strongly grounded in the expectations and wishes of peoples. The panel today offers an open space for dialogue on good practises, persistent challenges and ways to integrate human rights into the 2026 UN Water Conference, which constitutes a valuable contribution to all of this work. This panel will enlighten our collective path towards a conference aimed at action for transformation.

Reaffirming the openness towards listening to all stakeholders in a spirit of inclusion and joint work, Senegal announces that a high-level preparatory meeting will be held in January 2026 in Dhaka, for which invitations will be sent out soon. In closing, the Ambassador of Senegal vocally reiterates that **water is a right, water is life**. It is a bridge between peoples, it cannot be a factor for exclusion, it has to be a factor for inclusion and justice. In closing, Senegal calls on all stakeholders to ensure that the 2026 UN Water Conference is a historic turning point at which each human being, wherever they are, can live in dignity and peace and harmony with their environment.

#### **Ms. Carmela CURUP, Member, Association of Mayan Lawyers and Notaries of Guatemala**

Ms. Carmela CURUP evokes the rich Mayan traditions and imaginary. In the **Mayan worldview**, June 26 is the day of feminine energy, which she invokes to discuss about the synergy between the information system that circulates in the universe, which provides us the ability to cohabitate in our families and communities and work together in order to counter those who have undermined our dignity. To achieve this, the work at the international community level is essential to think together, meditate and come together to seek through emerging paradigms, such as the Mayan worldview, how we might reunite ourselves with the universe, with nature, with water, with the universe, because **we are one single being**.

Sharing some interpretative elements to properly understand the **worldview of Indigenous people on water**, Ms. Carmela CURUP explains it is considered to be a living being, which is in constant movement. **Water is a sacred being of movement**, which belongs to nature. It has its own dynamic. It has its own life cycles, its own cycles of being, of crying, of feeling. It is also present in the water tables, which encompasses land and the forest. It is, at the end of the day, the root of life, which gives nutrition and feeds the rest of life. **Water is the centre of the universe**.

For Mayan people in Guatemala, there are **ancestral ways of caring for water**. They are under the aegis of 17,000 local authorities, more or less, who are caring for this vital liquid and do this



on the basis of spirituality, whereby they make offerings, they give food, they give flowers. Included in the good practises, there is a constant gathering of rainwater in artisanal-made containers to be used for agriculture and irrigation. There is a constant interaction with trees. There are Commissions for cleaning out the irrigation channels and rivers and forests. There is a daily duty for communities to be able to interact with and use water.

The governance norms are focused on the free determination of the people, the **local forms of self-government**. There is a political dimension as well, which is included within the community decision-making bodies. Some of the proposals Indigenous peoples share in order to have a different management of water is that there is constant dialogue, consultation and participation between states and Indigenous people and Indigenous women in particular.

Decisions on water and natural possessions cannot be taken without the incorporation of the peoples and **adopting a cosmocentric vision of water**, which highlights human rights in all of the different forms of the expression of life, which is in harmony with indivisibility, interdependence, equality and non-discrimination so enshrined by human rights. These are in the Charter of the Earth. Obviously, **declaring water as a living being, a subject of rights**, is a challenge, but there has been progress on this in Bolivia and Ecuador. It has also been promoted in Colombian and Peruvian jurisprudence.

This **paradigm shift** means that **water has the right to life**. It has the right to exist. It has the right to regenerate itself, to maintain its identity, to be free of pollution and from toxic waste, which genetically change its structure, the right to sanitation and the right to full restoration. These rights can dismantle the asymmetries of power that are spiralling to the levels of poverty and death, which are profound inequalities in Guatemala, especially in terms of redistribution of land and natural wealth.

In **Guatemala**, 21% of the land is in Indigenous people's hands and 6% in the hands of Indigenous women, while 69% is in the hands of 2% of the people in Guatemala who have the economic, legal and privileged power in the country. In terms of access to water, 3 million do not have access to drinking water. 6 million do not have access to sanitation. **90% of the rivers are polluted due to mining operations**, which have had a huge impact on health, leading to diarrhoea, poisoning, dengue fever and other diseases. There is no water law at the end of the day, despite the fact that this has been mandated 30 years in national politics.

There is **no legal power to protect Indigenous rights**, which has led to a widespread criminalisation against Indigenous peoples and lands. To date, there have been 2,500 people with an arrest warrant over their heads. 3,350 of them are women. There has been a huge number of evictions among communities. Those **communities have disappeared with their ancient knowledge, understanding and heritage**. There are contemporary forms of genocide at play with this. This is the very concerning panorama in Guatemala.

In closing, Ms. Carmela CURUP evokes the words of a Mayan scholar, Daniel Matul, who in his book **'The Fullness of Life'** shares the following deep reflections –*'If we want to continue to cumulate wealth, it is useless to involve Indigenous people, but if we want to be happy and we want to reconnect people with Mother Earth and water, if we want to harmonise intergenerational relations, then we talk to Indigenous people.'*



## REPLIES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Mr. Pedro ARROJO-AGUDO** draws the Council's attention to the imperative of **embedding a human rights-based approach throughout the 2026 UN Water Conference**. To ensure that human rights underpin the Conference, each praesidium of the six interactive dialogues should be guided by persons such as Ms. Carmela CURUP, a water advocate and a water defender.

The Special Rapporteur (SR) further recalls that in such dark times, it seems that the priority must be given to an **arms race** which he depicts as crazy, suicidal, and leading to the collapse of the United Nations. The SR hopes that the financial restrictions imposed on the United Nations as a result of the arms race and the **blackmailing pressures** on the UN by powerful countries will not weaken his mandate at a crucial moment when the UN must be able to assume its responsibility on this vital front.

Honouring its commitment towards Senegal and the UAE, the SR has already to organised and set in place a large **social platform** to promote the participation of right holders. The SR looks forward to working hand-in-hand with this large platform and hosting countries, first of all to successfully organise the meeting being prepared in Dakar in the near future.

Turning to the **use of water as a weapon of war against civilian populations**, the SR is grateful that this event brings to the table of the Council the situation of the Palestinian people, and in particular the **population of Gaza**. The SR's position on water is unequivocally clear, and he insists on the fact that cutting off the supply of medicines and food to people, especially essential daily food and water, is a crime enshrined in the Rome Statute. This is not just the SR's opinion. It is the Rome Statute that qualifies such acts as **crime of extermination**. The SR calls on states to react to the evidence of the ongoing genocide, thereby issuing the following warning - *'our children will be ashamed of us if we don't react.'*

On the issue of **privatisation**, the SR states he is neither against the private market nor against the capital. However, the SR insists on the need to clarify the very nature of the challenge the world is facing, namely the **billions of people who do not have drinking water** at home, whom do not offer anyone a space for doing business. But they pose a great democratic challenge to all of us. They have cited Pope Francis, whom Mr. Pedro ARROJO-AGUDO has always admired. In this connection, the SR draws the Council's attention to his report to this year's UNGA on the **democratic governance of water as a common good**, and not as a commodity.

Speaking on behalf of the co-hosts, **Mr. Ndongo NIANG BA** representing the Senegalese delegation to UN Geneva expresses his deepest hope that the 2026 UN Water Conference will meet global expectations and will allow for political commitments and action. Senegal hopes the Conference will allow to forge **multi-stakeholder partnerships for technological and innovative solutions** to provide water in areas where it is truly essential and necessary. Turning to Palestine, the Senegalese delegation fully shares the serious concerns raised all along the panel discussion.

**Ms. Carmela CURUP** welcomes as a step forward the acknowledgment that water is not a commodity that can be exploited, sold and owned. It is in our hands and in the governments' hands to bring about this **paradigm shift**. She further praises the reflections on the connection with poverty emerging from the panel discussion, in particular the situation of rural communities



and Indigenous communities, which as a result of the context of colonisation are particularly vulnerable situation. It is highly valuable to ensure and benefit from the genuine participation of **Indigenous peoples** bringing their cultural paradigms and perspectives in future debates, in particular the fundamental concept that water cannot be possessed. It is just humans that have fostered an anthropocentric perspective, but the international community should think beyond that. This point needs to be incorporated into the 2026 Conference.

Turning to **Guatemala**, she positively notes a certain degree of democratic openness, as the new government is engaging in dialogues with Indigenous peoples on the issue of water. One of the key areas of work is on how to enshrine in law all of the **ancestral rights on natural resources** that are incumbent on Indigenous people. What was lost during the colonial process still has an impact to date. In these dialogues, she sees a window of opportunity to advance on the principle that **water is a living being and a subject of rights**.

Aware of the fact that in the Western paradigm it is difficult to conceive this, she positively notes progress in this direction, notably in South America and in New Zealand. She believes there is a lot of potential to switch thinking towards this new paradigm that Indigenous peoples are promoting. An Indigenous person feels it is water, it is in tune with the being of water. An enormous proportion of the human body comprises water, and it is connected to Mother Earth through water. So, why not **thinking ourselves as water** as well, which is a fact. Human beings are part of that cosmos through water. For this reason, Indigenous peoples want to make that connection by identifying a legal space within the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to lead to a **reinterpretation of human rights** to contemplate those new paradigms. Through this new way of thinking will allow for the protection of this essential liquid. Indigenous peoples believe that this very proposal will allow us to save the planet and guarantee a future with clean water and sanitation for future generations, a future where all have access to that water.

## INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

### Views Expressed by State Delegations

**Algeria** has elevated access to water to the rank of a national priority in the context of its national strategy to strengthen water security. The connection rate has reached 98% in Algeria and the ongoing expansion of a dam network to increase its storage capacity. Algeria has also rolled out a number of projects to use additional sources, such as desalination of seawater. Now there are stations which are fully equipped in order to source water by an increase of 60% in the future. Awareness-raising campaigns are being carried out by the authorities and civil society to ensure better, more efficient use of water and the protection of water from pollution. The Algerian policy is based on the diversification of water sources principle and a better use of water for the future.

**Armenia** affirms that the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are foundational to dignity, health, and sustainable development. Realizing these rights demands a people-centered, inclusive, and accountable approach that prioritizes vulnerable communities, ensures gender equity, and embraces local participation. Despite global recognition of these rights, millions still lack access to safe, affordable, and sustainable water and sanitation services disproportionately affecting women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, and those in rural and vulnerable communities. Climate change has resulted in water scarcity in Armenia, due to melting glaciers, declines in annual precipitation and land degradation and desertification



processes around the country, creating huge challenges for the sustainable development of the Armenian society. Therefore, Armenia attaches great importance to the full realization of the rights to water and sanitation through improving the efficiency of water use and protection of water resources. Notably, over the past decade, the Government of Armenia has undertaken important reforms to strengthen water governance, scale up best practices and innovative technologies strengthen early warning and disaster response systems and align national policy with international standards. Armenia further promotes civil society's engagement in water governance through participatory planning and oversight mechanisms, ensuring that local voices especially those of women and disadvantaged groups are reflected in decision-making. Armenia is actively cooperating with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in the Caucasus in promoting transparent and accountable management of water resources. Looking ahead to the 2026 UN Water Conference, Armenia calls for greater emphasis on coherent monitoring and accountability mechanisms, including through the mandate of the SR on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. Armenia believes that access to water and sanitation is not a privilege - it is a human right.

**Bahrain on behalf of the Arab group** stresses that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental human rights and a cornerstone for a safe, healthy and dignified life. Concerted efforts are important in order to distribute water equitably to achieve international peace and security. Praising Saudi Arabia's launching of an important agreement in this respect, the Arab group stresses the pivotal role of the 2030 Agenda and the 2026 Water Conference in order to achieve water security and sustainable development. The Arab group voices concern over the deteriorated humanitarian situation in conflict areas, including several Arab countries in Yemen, Sudan, Palestine and others. The humanitarian situation has aggravated and has had an adverse effect on safe water access as well as sanitation services. In this respect, the Arab group calls upon the protection of vital infrastructure, especially water and sanitation.

**Bolivia** appreciates the timely discussion on the cause and effect of inequalities in access to water and sanitation. Discrimination and exclusion contexts and the challenges that place people in a situation of disadvantage above all areas that require greater attention, including indigenous people's rights, peasants' rights and those of African descent. The provision of water and sanitation must be at the heart of international discussions. Bolivia aligns itself with the preparatory process to ensure that human rights dimensions are reflected in the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Water in 2026. Throughout this process, Bolivia invites that organisers take into account the UN Declaration on Peasants' Rights and the rights of others working in rural areas and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Bolivia also recalls that the declaration adopted during the sixth Latin American and Caribbean sanitation conference in 2022 included the need to strengthen international cooperation, technology transfer, skill transfer and guaranteeing that all have access to appropriate sanitation as a fundamental element to human dignity.

**China** has adhered to the new development concept of innovation, coordination, greenness, openness and sharing, and has made significant progress in achieving the water-related goals of the 2030 Agenda. In 2024, China completed the construction of 23,000 rural water supply projects, improving the water supply security level of 110 million rural people. The national rural tap water penetration rate reached 94%, the proportion of rural population covered by large-scale water supply projects reached 65%, and the water conservancy infrastructure conditions in



poverty-stricken areas were further improved. China has also actively promoted international exchanges and cooperation, successfully held the third Asian International Water Week, issued the Beijing Declaration, and actively participated in the first United Nations Water Conference in New York in 2023, the 10th World Water Forum, the Rome High-level Water Dialogue and other important international events. At present, the progress of various indicators of SDG 6 is lower than expected. There are still 2.2 billion people in the world who lack safe drinking water and 3.5 billion people who do not have access to sanitation facilities. The international community, including UN human rights mechanisms, should strengthen cooperation to protect the rights of vulnerable groups to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. China will actively support and participate in the 2026 Water Conference, and looks forward to providing valuable suggestions.

**Eritrea** reaffirms that safe drinking water and sanitation are fundamental human rights central to the right to an adequate standard of living in Eritrea for dignity, health and development. Since independence, Eritrea has made notable progress. Access to clean water has increased from 13% in 1991 to approximately 85% today. In rural areas, coverage has risen from 5% to nearly 80%, and in urban areas from 32% over 92%, narrowing the historical rural-urban gap and reflecting our commitment to equity and social justice. This progress extends to public institutions. Over half of all schools nationwide now have access to safe water, and water access in health facilities has improved significantly, enhancing hygiene, supporting safe childbirth and reducing neonatal mortality. These gains are underpinned by Eritrea's integrated water policy and legal frameworks, which promote inclusive water governance, sustainability and community participation. Infrastructure investments have multiplied the number of dams and ponds from 138 at independence to nearly 800 today, expanding irrigation and building climate resilience. As the global community advances towards the 2030 SDGs, Eritrea remains committed to expanding water access, enhancing agricultural efficiency, protecting ecosystems and advancing the human rights to water and sanitation through innovation, conservation and cooperation.

The **Gambia** welcomes this timely panel and extends its appreciation to the panellists and all stakeholders contributing to the realisation of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. Access to water and sanitation is not only a human right, it is a matter of dignity, survival and justice. As a country vulnerable to climate change, the Gambia has prioritised these rights at the heart of its national development agenda. Under the 2023-2027 Yoruba National Development Plan, water sanitation and hygiene are prioritised through climate resilient infrastructure, national wash mapping and strong monitoring systems to ensure inclusive and sustainable access for all. In partnership with the African Development Bank and UNICEF, the Gambia is implementing a climate smart rural wash project to improve sanitation facilities and expand access to safe drinking water. Nearly 90% of primary schools now meet national wash standards, including safe drinking water and gender sensitive hygiene facilities, reflecting the growing alignment between our national policies and the sustainable development goals. The Gambia is further strengthening capacity across the health and education sectors through targeted training and community led approaches. Looking ahead to the 2026 UN Water Conference, the Gambia calls for a renewed global commitment to equity, inclusion and sustainable financing in WASH.

**Germany jointly with Spain** as the core group on the resolution on safe drinking water and sanitation note with alarm that the world is drying up. The increasing shortage of clean drinking water is endangering the health of billions of people. This is directly related to climate change and



the stress on the environment. Limited access to water and sanitation is hindering development and proper economic activity. These challenges are even more severe for groups in vulnerable situations, and can only be addressed through combined national efforts and international cooperation. The 2026 UN Water Conference offers a unique opportunity to address these challenges comprehensively, with a human rights-based approach at its core. Germany and Spain welcome the co-hosts' inclusion of a dedicated space for human rights and call on all participants to prominently include a human rights perspective throughout all dialogues. Furthermore, civil society should be involved throughout the process. Lastly, they call on all member states to ensure regular updates through UN Water Conferences beyond 2028.

**Iceland on behalf the Nordic Baltic countries** recalls that the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are foundational for human dignity, health and equality. Yet billions remain without access, with women, girls, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and those in vulnerable situations disproportionately affected. The 2026 United Nations Water Conference has the potential to become a decisive step forward, where all commitments on water and sanitation are firmly grounded in human rights and result in inclusive and lasting impact. A human rights-based approach must be a cross-cutting element of all conference outcomes, including the six interactive dialogues. The Nordic-Baltic countries commend the SR's efforts to highlight the importance of democratic water governance as a key factor for the effective realisation of human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and echo his call for continued cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. Effective water management necessitates collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders, including local and regional governments, private sector entities, civil society and community organisations.

**Indonesia** stresses that the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are not new, but too often, they remain unrealized. At the current speed, in 2030, 2 billion people will still live without safely managed drinking water and 3 billion without safely managed sanitation. Indonesia is not immune to these challenges. Water is not evenly distributed across in the archipelago, nor throughout the year, and Indonesia continues to grapple with water pollution. The government has set ambitious national targets - 100% access to safe drinking water by 2045. Indonesia is expanding water infrastructure nationwide, preserving natural water sources, upgrading old dams, and building new ones to improve storage. It is also reforming the delivery management of drinking water across the country. But national efforts alone are not enough. Global cooperation must be boosted through capacity-building, technology transfer, investment, and research. Special attention should also be given to the unique burdens women and girls face in collecting water and managing sanitation. Bringing water to the doorstep can ease these burdens, freeing time for education, health, and economic opportunity. In closing, Indonesia reaffirms its commitment to ensure the highest attainable standard of living, including by making safe drinking water and sanitation a reality for all, and by working hand-in-hand with civil societies in the issue of water and sanitation.

**Iraq** has encountered significant challenges now for decades, which have had an impact on water provision and sanitation services, the results of armed conflict, the destruction of infrastructure, water shortage, climate change and internal displacement. Iraq denounces attacks against civilian infrastructure around water in the context of conflicts and greets the content of the report as it relates to the suffering of IDPs with limited access to water and sanitation. This is what Iraq regularly sees on the ground. Water shortage is not only an environmental crisis, but they are a



direct threat on fundamental rights. Iraq appreciates the emphasis placed in the report on the needs of women and girls above all in terms of their need to have safe sanitation facilities during menstruation. In this connection, Iraq states that its sustainable development programme up to 2028 contains clear provisions on the improvement of water and sanitation services and the equitable distribution thereof, particularly in rural areas and displaced communities. These provisions also stipulate the development of infrastructure and the adoption of development techniques over time. By way of conclusion, Iraq reiterates its commitment to the SDGs and will be pursuing ongoing national efforts thanks to international support.

**Kuwait** appreciates the efforts made to promote and protect access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Sanitation Kuwait reiterates the importance of UNHRC resolution 57/13 on the right to drinking water and sanitation as a fundamental right and as an integral part of the right to health and to decent life. Kuwait believes in the importance of collective effort to guarantee water and sanitation to all with no discrimination above all in emergency and armed conflict contexts. Kuwait expresses its concern over threats to its water security, which is fragile because it depends on the water from the Gulf as a primary source of drinking water following desalination. Pursuant to the various attacks in the region, including attacks on nuclear plants, has a direct impact on the fundamental rights of people in our region and limits our access to safe water. Kuwait invites the international community to promote legal protection of water plants and water sources in conflict contexts. In conclusion, Kuwait firmly believes that this right requires international and regional cooperation and technical and financial support to developing countries.

**Kuwait on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** welcomes this panel discussion as well as the initiatives by its countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Senegal hosting the UN conference in 2026, which is the first convention on water and sanitation. These are important opportunities to find creative solutions and to face water challenges worldwide. Access to safe water and sanitation is a fundamental human right and is connected to a number of important rights. Barriers have to be removed in order to enjoy this right - an absolute priority to the GCC countries due to the climate challenges faced. The GCC countries have adopted an integrated approach to water resource management, promoting cooperation, exchange of expertise and best practises and innovative solutions in this field. It seems to contribute to collective efforts to achieve this fundamental human right. In this vein, the GCC countries launched the Global Water Organisation under the patronage of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and held an international ceremony with broad participation to sign the accession Charter and to launch the Organisation's work at its headquarters in Riyadh. This event serves as an international platform to promote cooperation, to find sustainable solutions and to support developing countries. Combined efforts will allow us to guarantee this human right and move towards a more just, sustainable and inclusive future. The GCC countries invite all other states to join the Global Water Organisation and to actively participate in contributing to the development of sustainable solutions as well as the promotion of innovation and water resource management.

**Luxembourg** is grateful to all of the panellists for their enlightening statements, which rightly emphasise the requirement for an integrated approach, taking account of environmental, social and gender dimensions. Luxembourg asks how could multilateral mechanisms better support states' efforts and those of their partners to ensure lasting, equitable and rights-based access to drinking water, in particular in the SIDS, which are confronted by growing environmental challenges. Access to drinking water and sanitation are not just technical services. Their

provision is tantamount to the provision of human rights, rights that are essential for the full enjoyment of other interrelated human rights, such as the right to health or that to education. The Luxembourg Corporation places these issues at the heart of its environment and climate change strategy, in line with our commitment to support human rights, gender equality and the full enjoyment of rights towards the 2030 Agenda. A specific example of this commitment is the National Water and Sanitation Programme and its cooperation with Cabo Verde which involves the construction of a desalination plant which is 100% powered by solar energy. This sustainable infrastructure will allow a lasting response to the water needs of 5,000 inhabitants of the island.

**Malaysia** reaffirms that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, essential for the enjoyment of life, dignity and health. Malaysia remains firmly committed to protecting this right in all circumstances, including during armed conflict. In September last year, Malaysia led a joint statement stressing the urgent need to safeguard water access in crises such as in Gaza. Ahead of the 2026 UN Water Conference, Malaysia calls for the protection of civilian water infrastructure, safe humanitarian access and the deployment of innovative solutions to restore water and sanitation services in emergencies. Domestically, Malaysia has made substantial progress in ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, achieving near universal coverage in urban areas. The country continues to prioritise rural communities through dedicated national programmes, such as the Rural Water Supply Programme and the Water Supply and Environmental Sanitisation Programme. These initiatives have expanded household access, reduced waterborne diseases and improved the quality of life for underserved populations. Under our Water Sector Transformation 2040 Agenda, Malaysia focusses on integrated water management, climate resilience, infrastructure modernisation and digital innovation to ensure sustainable and equitable services.

**Pakistan** positively notes the growing normative mainstreaming of right to water and sanitation. Increasing water stress around the world under the impacts of climate change, and growing demand requires close attention of the council. Cooperative and sustainable management of shared water resources remains integral to our search for solutions. In pursuing the UNHRC's mission to strengthen the international human rights legal framework and norms, the risks and opportunities presented by shared water sources must not be overlooked. In his July 2023 report (A/78/253) to the UNGA, the SR on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation cited the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 as a 'promising practice to address human rights in transboundary basins.' The Treaty has complemented the development of international norms such as equitable and reasonable utilization of transboundary watercourses, avoiding significant harm, and exchanging information among riparian states. These norms constitute effective human rights guardrails. It should continue to serve as an example and inspiration to the world at a time of crisis. The UNHRC should be alarmed to see it recklessly jeopardised through unilateral acts that lack any legal standing. Failure to adhere to legal obligations under bilateral water treaties and international law carries grave human rights risks for the rights of riparian people to water, sanitation, food, health, environment, and development - to name only a few. It disproportionately impacts women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and peasants. Impunity for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law must not extend to undermining hard earned international norms on use of shared waters. Weaponizing water for geopolitics is a grave risk and a potential crime and entails far-reaching adverse impacts



on the enjoyment of human rights. Unilateral and illegal moves to weaponize water should therefore be firmly rejected.

**Saudi Arabia** believes that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental human right and a priority in its national and international efforts. In line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is adopting an integrated approach to water resource management that promotes cooperation and the exchange of expertise, best practices, and innovative solutions in this field, contributing to collective efforts to achieve this fundamental human right. In this context, the Kingdom launched the World Water Organization under the patronage of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and held an international ceremony with broad local and international participation to sign the accession charter and launch the Organization's work from its headquarters in Riyadh. This ceremony serves as an international platform that promotes cooperation in finding sustainable solutions and supports developing countries in building their water capacity. Combined efforts will enable us to guarantee this human right and move forward toward a more just, sustainable, and inclusive future. In conclusion, Saudi Arabia calls on all countries to join this pioneering global initiative, represented by the World Water Organization, and to actively participate in its work, contributing to the development of sustainable solutions and promoting innovation in water resource management.

**Senegal** recalls that water is a vital, cross-cutting and universal issue, inextricably connected to human dignity, health, food security, peace and sustainable development. Aware of this challenge, Senegal has always placed a priority on water, both nationally and internationally. Nationally speaking, significant efforts have been made to improve access to drinking water in the context of its national policy for universal access to water, with significant progress in the reduction of territorial disparities, particularly thanks to the hydraulic wing of the Emergency Community Development Programme and the Millennial Drinking Water Programme. At the international level, Senegal continues to lobby to support equitable and sustainable governance for water resources within international agencies and international meetings that we are calling for around water questions. In this connection, Senegal is particularly honoured to co-preside with the UAE the 2026 United Nations Water Conference. This crucial moment will absolutely constitute a key opportunity to progress with this. Senegal calls on all to collectively mobilise to support the 2026 Water Conference in order to achieve a decisive step towards the universal realisation of the rights to water and sanitation.

**Slovenia on behalf of 'water and human rights group'<sup>1</sup>** emphasizes the critical importance of fully integrating human rights and human rights-based approach into the 2026 UN Water Conference. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation are human rights, indispensable for the enjoyment of other rights and the achievement of sustainable development. The group calls for the preparatory process to ensure the meaningful participation of all stakeholders, especially marginalized groups, Indigenous peoples, women, and youth, whose voices have historically been underrepresented. This inclusive approach must be reflected in the interactive dialogues, which should prioritize accountability, non-discrimination, and equitable access, addressing

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<sup>1</sup> Group comprising Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Maldives, Malta, Mongolia, Montenegro, Mozambique, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Panama, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

systemic inequalities in water governance. The group stresses that the outcomes of the Conference must deliver clear, human rights based commitments, with measurable targets and transparent monitoring mechanisms aligned with international human rights standards, reflected in the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation. The group stands committed to championing human rights based agenda that promotes water justice and sustainable management for all. Only through embedding human rights at the core of this global dialogue, the vision of universal, equitable access to water and sanitation can be realized.

**South Africa** supports the view that water scarcity around the world is exacerbated by the raging effects of the phenomenon of climate change. South Africa has made satisfactory progress in pushing back the backlogs inherited 30 years ago and have managed to transform the socio-economic landscape of the country. Democracy has enabled the protection and promotion of human rights and civil liberties. South Africa is one of the few countries where water is deemed a human right as enshrined in the constitution. As a consequence, and in accordance with the national constitution, the right of access to sufficient water is accorded to everyone. South Africa's Water Services Act provides that everyone has a right of access to basic water supply and sanitation services. Every water services institution must take steps to realise these rights. Every municipality must plan in its water services development plan to realise these rights. The government will continue to implement progressive policies and programmes to uplift the material conditions of all South Africans, particularly the society's most vulnerable, through infrastructure development and management of water services.

The **State of Palestine** denounces that Israel continues its unimpeded genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people. Palestinians are deprived from access to water and sanitation; the occupying power has enforced policies that deliberately and disproportionately deny them this life-sustaining resource. In the West Bank, every Palestinian receive only 88 litres per day, below the WHO's minimum standard of 120 litres, while illegal settlers consume up to eight times more without restriction. This water apartheid extends to agriculture, where Palestinian farmers struggle to sustain crops amid water scarcity and relentless settler attacks, resulting in food insecurity and rural displacement. In Gaza, Israel has bombed water pipelines, cut off electricity, blocked fuel and killed utility workers. 84.6% of Gaza's water and sanitation infrastructure is destroyed, water availability is 2.9 litres per person daily, far below the UN's emergency minimum of 15 litres. Human Rights Watch links thousands of deaths to this deprivation. Collapsing hygiene systems have sparked polio outbreaks. Over 1.8 million people, including children and the injured, urgently need water, sanitation, and hygiene aid. These deliberate acts amount to collective punishment, rising to crimes against humanity and acts of genocide. The State of Palestine calls on all states to act as follows: end the occupation, guarantee unhindered humanitarian access, and hold criminals accountable.

**Viet Nam** reiterates that access to clean and safe water is the fundamental right of every human being. Managing and using water resources is one of the major issues facing the world today. Water deserves to be placed at the centre of the global political agenda and the international community should take action to protect water resources in order to prevent conflicts and ensure the prosperity in the future. Vietnam's national strategy prioritises water security, climate adaptation and rural access. Viet Nam has also actively contributed to global discussions at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. It has consistently advocated for SDG 6

and for addressing water challenges in connection with food security and climate resilience. In the lead up to the 2026 UN Water Conference, Viet Nam emphasised the need for international cooperation, science-based policy making and community engagement in ensuring equitable access, especially for rural and vulnerable populations.

**Tanzania** emphasizes that water is fundamental to all aspects of life. It is a basic human right and a core element of Agenda 2030, which promises to leave no one behind. Regrettably, half of the world's population lacks access to safe and clean water. This number is set to grow due to population growth, urbanization, demand for water for agriculture and energy, and shrinking water resources. Individual and collective actions must be taken to ensure the continued realization of this right. On its part, Tanzania has in place a legal framework for ensuring access to and protection of water resources. In addition to building water distribution infrastructure in urban areas, it has drilled over 1,221 boreholes and numerous water reservoirs across the country. To sustain these costly projects, the government has developed a unified billing system for the collection of non-tax revenue from water and sanitation services. It is also conserving and protecting catchment areas, promoting sustainable land use, and enhancing the climate resilience of communities. The overall implementation of various water projects in the country has increased access to clean and safe drinking water in line with SDG 6. Tanzania is committed to the progressive realization of this right for all its people.

**Zimbabwe** appreciates the insightful discussion by the panellists on the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, rights that are foundational to the realisation of other socio-economic rights, including the rights to health, food, education and human dignity. In partnership with development partners, Zimbabwe has implemented a range of comprehensive programmes to improve access to water and sanitation across rural and urban communities. Key among these is the Rural Wash Programme, which aims to reduce morbidity and mortality linked to wash-related diseases, lessen the burden of water collection on women and girls and promote dignity, education and gender equality. The Small Towns Wash Programme has helped reduce the incidence of water-borne diseases through the rehabilitation of water and wastewater infrastructure, thus enhancing water supply and treatment efficiency. Zimbabwe has prioritised urban resilience through targeted interventions under the Urban Resilience Project, which includes the construction and rehabilitation of public wash facilities. The Government has undertaken several large-scale public sector investment projects aimed at increasing water security. Zimbabwe is implementing the National Water Harvesting Programme, which is improving access to water for both domestic use and livestock in rural communities and supporting food security through irrigation schemes. The country remains open to continued partnership and constructive dialogue with international stakeholders in accelerating progress towards SDG 6 in building resilient, inclusive, sustainable water and sanitation systems.

#### **Views Expressed by Intergovernmental Organizations and UN Entities**

The **European Union**, stressing the existing challenges on the realisation of human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, sees the 2026 UN Water Conference as a unique opportunity to make sure that all discussions on water maintain a strong focus on human rights. Water must remain available to all human beings. It must be made accessible and kept affordable and be provided in a way that protects human dignity. None of these dimensions can be achieved without ensuring that the quality and quantity of water resources worldwide, even in times of competing



uses and needs, remain fit for human consumption. Aiming to keep water high on the global political agenda, the EU looks forward to mainstreaming the mentioned criteria at the 2026 Water Conference and calls for regular UN conferences on water to allow for a continuous dialogue between states and stakeholders on water, the promotion of partnerships and solutions to overcome global water challenges, and the fulfilment of the human rights to water and sanitation.

The **Sovereign Order of Malta** praises the panellists' insightful reflections, which are a valuable contribution to the effort of mainstreaming the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation into the 2026 UN Water Conference. Through its Global WASH programme, implemented by its relief agency Malteser International, the Sovereign Order actively contributes to the realisation of these rights in different regions of the world. In 2024, the Order of Malta provided WASH services to about a million people, with major projects in Uganda and Nepal. It also works to uphold these fundamental guarantees in conflict-affected areas and contexts of forced displacement, reaching thousands of beneficiaries in South Sudan and the DRC. At the same time, the Order of Malta supports governments in the provision of WASH services through capacity-building measures, both at the technical and policy level. The Order of Malta promotes inclusive water management policies, which are an integral part of its own *WASH Guidelines for field practitioners*. By supporting the *Making Rights Real* (MMR) approach, the Order aims to include rights holders in decision-making processes, which is crucial to design sustainable and realistic solutions that recognise the agency of local communities.

**UNESCO** welcomes this vital discussion and reaffirms that access to safe water and sanitation is a fundamental human right central to dignity, health, gender equality and sustainable development. Through its intergovernmental ideological programme, UNESCO assists countries in building stronger, more inclusive and science-driven water governance. UNESCO supports gender-responsive policies, empower youth and elevate Indigenous and local knowledge systems that have long safeguarded water resources. In an age of climate disruption and rising water stress, continuing with business as usual is not an option. We need bold cooperative action, scientific partnerships, open data sharing and early warning systems that help communities adapt and build resilience before it's too late. UNESCO uses renewed political will and multilateral solidarity to close the gaps, lift the barriers and ensure that the right to water and sanitation becomes a reality for all without exception and delay.

**UNICEF** emphasizes children's human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Yet every day, over 1,000 children die from wash-related diseases before reaching their fifth birthday. Inadequate infrastructure, contaminated water resources and continued lack of access and availability to safe water and sanitation are the key barriers to the implementation of this human right. UNICEF calls on states to address these barriers to scale up their efforts to further strengthen the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation within their national policies and to make certain that human rights, including children's rights, are incorporated in the preparatory discussions of the 2026 Water Conference. The latter provides a platform for states to elevate their political leadership, building upon their commitments made in the Water Action Agenda and an opportunity to re-emphasise their commitments to the realisation of those rights, including for children. UNICEF echoes the calls for the inclusion of human rights in the 2026 Water Conference Agenda and Outcomes, as well as broad civil society participation, including meaningful child participation. UNICEF stands ready to support states and partners on this journey to make safe drinking water and sanitation a reality for every child.



### Views Expressed by Non-Governmental Organizations

**Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23)** recalls Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) reminding us that the world has a great social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their dignity. As a civil society organisation working on the ground with marginalised people, APG23 recalls the sufferings of the communities living in remote areas such as the arid and semi-arid lands of North Kenya. They are among the most affected by climate change, which they are not responsible for. Climate change-induced extreme events like droughts and floods not only deprive them of access to drinking water, but also impede their right to development and other basic rights, endanger livelihoods and fuel conflicts and force migrations. In his 2023 report, the SR on the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, pointed out that the roots of this water crisis lie in the unsustainability of the current development model based on the paradigm of domination of nature in the greed and irresponsibility of the rich. APG23 urgently calls for overcoming such paradigms, restoring the victims of the climate change-related harms, and fully implementing the polluter pays principle by undertaking courageous actions led by international solidarity and a right to development approach.

The **Organisation for Defending Victims of Violence** states that access to drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental right for the occupied territories. This right is strengthened thanks to article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention guaranteeing the right to essential resources. Despite commitments made in this field, Israel is depriving the inhabitants of Gaza of access to this essential resource, thus depriving inhabitants of essential resources. Through this, Israel is aiming to displace Indigenous people and permanently occupy the territory. Its aim is to weaken the resilience of inhabitants and thus trigger them to leave their lands. Israel has been targeting deliberately water infrastructure and also lands. This represents a violation of article 54 of the First Optional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions and the principle of non-discrimination. The Organization urges the SR on the right to drinking water and sanitation to urgently condemn these steps. These acts constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law and qualify as a war crime.

**Centre Europe Tiers Monde** gives the floor to a representative of the Peruvian Environmental Protection League. The Antamina Mining Company, which belongs to Glencore, has been draining water reserves in Peru. The San Marcos people have been devastated by this and we are polluted by lead and arsenic. The San Marcos, Chavin de Huanta and Guamal people are affected by this. It is an outrage how transnational companies are shattering human rights. Caring for water and heritage for humanity is incumbent on all of us. We cannot be accomplices in the destruction of humanity. It is time to fight for our rights. It is time to have change and to claim our rights. With faith in humanity, the representative believes it is still possible to save the world, but this would mean sacrifices and fights and listening to environmental rights defenders. Without a change in attitude, devastation for humanity is imminent. The League urges the Peruvian state to respect its international commitments in the area of environment and human rights and to repeal the policies which have authorised the scale-up of the operations of the Antamina Mining Company.

**Minority Rights Group (MRG)** jointly with Endorois Indigenous Women Empowerment Network (EIWEN) draws the panel's attention to the severe impact of climate change on the Endorois of Lake Baringo in Kenya and other Indigenous people around the world, in particular to their right to



clean and safe water. The climate crisis comes on top of pollution, resource mismanagement and unrestricted access that have led to increased cases of water-borne diseases, food insecurity and other erosion of medicinal biodiversity. Indigenous women, children and people with disabilities bear the heaviest burden of environmental destruction. An intersectional approach to address this challenge is urgently needed. The rights of Indigenous persons with disabilities have often been ignored in land governance, environmental protection and cultural revitalisation. Indigenous struggle, disability rights and justice are often separate struggles. They are deeply interconnected and must be addressed together. Therefore, MRG jointly with EIWEN recommend that the UN system and member states support Indigenous-led solutions that centre on intersectionality, especially those working at the nexus of the right to clean water, land rights, health, disability inclusion and climate justice.

**Juventum** recalls that access to safe drinking water is not just a service, it is a fundamental right. No person should be discriminated against or marginalised. It is also wrong if half a litre of water in a PET bottle costs more than a litre of gasoline. Privatisation is a severe challenge to the equitable distribution and quality of drinking water. It is particularly a serious risk to the vulnerable groups of people. A state has an obligation to protect its citizens. States should not give up public control over drinking water to the profit-driven activities of private entities. There are already a sufficient number of examples of the damage caused by the privatisation of drinking water in this world. The lessons must be learned. The state must be ultimately responsible for the right to water and the UN should provide strict guidelines on water governance to the member states. Water is the oil of the 21st century. Humanity should have enough wisdom to improve the water distribution.

The **Indian Council of South America** asks if states members of the 2006 Conference on Water and Sanitation identify and address the discrimination, apartheid, colonialism and foreign occupation in association with economic development, water and these human rights violations. The right to development CEDAW, the outcome document of the WCAR 2001 and the Durban Review Conference list these violations. The USA, Canada and many Western states grant impunity by acts of omission. They refuse to address taking fresh water, giving it to the hands of white controlled apartheid government, state of Alaska and other peoples based on the 1493 Papal Bull. The Indian Council diplomatically protests the eliciting UNGA resolution 1469 of 1959, removing Alaska and Hawaii, denying self-determination and the right to its property on grounds of racial discrimination, granting it solely to the white race. White apartheid constitutional convention, white apartheid vote, military vote. The negative impact of the legacies of colonialism needs to be part of the protection to address governments and individuals in the denial of consent, including for the use of puppet governments for consent.

**Edmund Rice International (ERI)** supports the efforts of the UNHRC to identify ways to ensure effective, safe and meaningful participation of rights holders, environmental human rights defenders, civil society and others in the 2026 United Nations Water Conference. ERI commends especially the eloquent and heartfelt entreaty of Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, SR on the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, that the UN take seriously and powerfully the processes it must engage. We cannot defer these questions only to transnational corporations. The United Nations must protect those peoples made poor whose voices are now being excluded. Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si*, the world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.



In light of the continual resistance of the developed world to address the inequalities around access to water and sanitation, ERI asks the panel what would be the best path forward to compel wealthy nations to remedy these inequalities, and to what extent does the panel believe that the privatisation of water is ever a good outcome in regions of chronic water scarcity.

The **Swiss Agency for Development and Human Rights (Agence Suisse pour le développement et les droits de l'homme, ASDH)** welcomes this roundtable on two essential rights which are still disregarded, the access to drinking water and sanitation. To date, 418 million Africans still do not have access to safe drinking water and nearly 800 million are deprived of basic sanitation services. This lack compromises public health, increases inequality and is a barrier to development on the continent. In order to achieve the SDGs related to water by 2030, Africa will need to mobilise more than \$64 billion a year, whereas currently the figure only stands at \$20 billion. The Swiss Agency welcomes the agreement that was signed between Morocco and the UAE to the tune of \$15 billion in 2025. That project is on sanitation and ecosystems. The Agency calls for Pan-African mobilisation on water, which is a vector of peace, in order to achieve sustainable development.

**VIVAT International** stresses that there is a growing concern about the water quality in the mid-north coast of New South Wales, Australia. Mining for minerals on the Dorigo Plateau and the wide Kato Creek area present an escalating threat. Mining minerals in areas of high rainfall extremely increases the risk of water contamination. Toxic runoff from tailings dams drain into the rivers and the flow to the estuaries downstream to the sea. This raises concern about antimony and tungsten exploration in the catchments of Nymboida and Clarence Rivers, which supply drinking water to around 100,000 people. The burgeoning industry of blueberries causes further concern in this region. Runoff from blueberry farms damage the ecosystem of waterways such as Hearn's Lake, coupled with chemicals leaching into the groundwater around Couch Harbour and the Nambucca Valley. Vivat International and Edmunds Rice International recommend that the Australian Government immediately stop new approvals or renewals and start revoking existing exploratory mining licences for the mid-north coast; commit to reconciliatory practises of continuous consultative engagement with the traditional landowners to avoid harming any more sacred and significant sites; seriously review the current inadequacies in the regulations on the use of pesticides on blueberry farms in the mid-north coast of New South Wales region and strongly enforce serious consequences for violators of said rights.

**Environment Conservation Organization - Foundation for Afforestation Wild Animals and Nature (ECO-FAWN)** explains that India, home to one-sixth of humanity, has made significant strides in advancing SDG 6. The Government of India flagship *Jal Jeevan Mission* aims to provide functional water connection to every rural household by 2024. As of now, over 150 million households have been reached, with a sharp rise in inclusive access of women, children and marginalised communities. The *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* Clean India Mission, launched in 2014, has transformed sanitation coverage with over 100 million toilets constructed. Open defecation has drastically reduced, particularly in rural areas. These programmes are complemented by robust awareness campaign, community engagement and technological interventions such as real-time dashboard and GIS-based monitoring. Furthermore, India has committed to treating and safely reusing wastewater, ensuring environmental sustainability alongside human rights fulfilment. Civil society organisations and local bodies are playing a pivotal role in strengthening delivery, accountability and equitable access, particularly in remote, tribal and climate-



vulnerable areas. ECO-FAWN emphasises the importance of international cooperation, knowledge exchange and climate-resilient infrastructure to ensure the continuity of water rights amid growing challenges. In conclusion, India's efforts underscore that large-scale policy commitment, backed by grassroots implementation and rights-based framework, can deliver meaningful progress.

Since its inception, **India Water Foundation** has been advocating for access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation as its fundamental in achieving gender equality, improving health outcomes, enhancing education attainment and fostering economic development. In India, women and girls often wear the burden of fetching water, which limits their time for education and income-generating activities. Recognising these challenges, the Government of India initiated the Judgement Mission to provide functional tap water connections to every rural household. As of 2025, the Mission has successfully reached out to 140 million households, significantly reducing the distress faced by women and improving public health outcomes. The Mission also leads to the implementation of almost 1.1 million people every year for the operation and maintenance of the piped water supply schemes and help states provide employment at the grassroots. The Government's approach to 2025 reflects a coordinated and multi-state strategy supported by strong central funding aiming to bridge the final gaps and ensure that every citizen, regardless their location, has access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, both essential for public health, gender equality and national resilience.

**Shaanxi Patriotic Volunteer Association** stresses that the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation is the foundation of resilient all the rights. In the past few years, the Association organised volunteers to conduct research trips in remote areas to understand the actual needs of local residents regarding drinking water. It has compiled many reports to the UNHRC, actively participating in its meetings and seeking cooperation with UN and its relevant agencies, hoping to collaborate with various human rights experts and Special Rapporteurs to jointly advance the cause of human rights and contribute to world peace. For the 2026 UN Water Conference and the current human rights efforts, the Association proposes that countries should strengthen technical cooperation and increase protective investments in drinking water. Meanwhile, raise public awareness about drinking water should be raised, and strongly advocate for water conservation and resource protection. To realise the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, this is a shared responsibility for all. More than 150 member organisations of the Shaanxi Association are willing to work closely with governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and all sectors of society to jointly address global drinking water and sanitation issues.

## FACTS & FIGURES ON ID PARTICIPATION

**24** State Delegations

**4** Inter-Governmental Organizations and UN Entities

**12** Non-Governmental Organizations