



Caritas in Veritate Foundation

"Authentic development must foster the development of each man and the whole man."



Concept Note

Side-event on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

14th September 2017, 13h00-15h00, Room XXIV, Palais des Nations

The Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, the Permanent Mission of the Order of Malta to the United Nations in Geneva and the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation (www.fciv.org) are organizing a side-event, in conjunction with the 36th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, on the following theme: "**The Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation**".

This event will be based on a publication about the Right to Water being prepared by the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation; the publication will be distributed during the side-event.

Date and Place of the Venue

The event will take place on Thursday, 14 September, 2017, between 1 pm and 3 pm, at the *Palais des Nations*, Room XXIV in Geneva (Switzerland).

Context

Water is an essential element in all aspects of life; however, at the present time, almost 2 billion people are forced to live without a sufficient amount of water for their domestic or personal use. Safe drinking water and sanitation are indispensable to sustain life and health, and they are fundamental to the dignity of all. Yet, 884 million people do not have access to safe drinking water, while 2.5 billion lack access to decent sanitation facilities. In the last decades, the crucial role of water in development has been recognized by such initiatives as the UN decision to call the "Water for Life" Decade (2005-2015), and various governments and international organizations have developed programmes dedicated to addressing these complex problems.

Since 2003, the issue of water and sanitation has become a top priority for international development and public health agencies. Currently, there seems to be a common agreement that the survival of humanity and all species on earth depends, to a great degree, on the availability of potable water and of effective sanitation systems. Such access is key to life with dignity and to promoting and upholding human rights.

As His Holiness Pope Francis reminds us, “All people have a right to safe drinking water. This is a basic human right and a central issue in today’s world”¹. Water is a public good which “finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right”².

The numbers of people deprived of such access shed light on a worrying situation. In fact, the reality is much worse, since millions of poor people living in informal settlements usually are not even included in national statistics. The majority of them live in rural areas, in developing or less developed countries. According to the IOM and UNHCR (*IOM Atlas 2016*), lack of water is an important cause of displacement. Environmental changes threaten millions of people around the world, and we encounter increasing evidence of competition and conflicts over shared fresh water resources.

The World Health Organization states, “Safe and readily available water is important for public health, whether it is used for drinking, domestic use, food production or recreational purposes. Improved water supply and sanitation, and better management of water resources, can boost countries’ economic growth and can contribute greatly to poverty reduction.”³

Water scarcity and deprivation is experienced most dramatically by those living in poverty, and often in the poorest countries. Paradoxically, in richer countries, water is wasted and not perceived as the luxury it really is. Citizens in high-income countries very often take for granted their privileged situations without thinking of the consequences that the waste of water has on the lives of their brothers and sisters in the rest of the world. However, the concept of “family of nations” should remind us that responsibility for those who are poor rests, in particular, with those who enjoy a richer lifestyle. In a family, every member is responsible for each and every other member; thus, the suffering of one becomes the suffering of all.

The creation of the mandate of a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation puts explicit focus on the right to available, accessible, safe, acceptable and affordable water for all, without discrimination. The Special Rapporteur also is expected to provide recommendations to Governments, to

¹ Address of Pope Francis to Conference on the Human Right to Water, Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 23 February 2017, available at http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/02/24/pope_francis_addresses_vatican_conference_on_right_to_water/1294848

² Address of Pope Francis to Conference on the Human Right to Water, Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 23 February 2017, available at http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/02/24/pope_francis_addresses_vatican_conference_on_right_to_water/1294848

³ World Health Organization, *Fact Sheet on Drinking Water*, reviewed November 2016, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs391/en/>

the United Nations and other stakeholders on how to facilitate access to water for all peoples throughout the world.

In 2010, the UN General Assembly formally recognized the right to water and sanitation by acknowledging that clean drinking water and sanitation are integral to the realization of all human rights. In 2015, the General Assembly Resolution 70/169 recognized the distinction between the right to water and the right to sanitation, making it a big step in the prioritization of sanitation. Moreover, in 2015, world leaders agreed on how to better position the international community to address some of the most pressing global challenges. Among them, is the need to ensure access to water and sanitation for all (Goal 6 of the SDGs).

The human rights to water and sanitation are explicitly referenced in this 2030 Agenda, and targets 6.1 and 6.2 are in line with some aspects of the normative content of those rights. The Goals are considered interdependent, and it is very clear that achieving Goal 6 will have a great impact on the realization of other Goals. At the same time, several Goals are fundamental for the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation (such as Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries and Goal 17 on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development).

However, this is not enough. We need to move forward. As His Holiness Pope Francis stated, the right to water is also a duty to water, which is basic and pressing.⁴ Basic, because where there is water there is life, making it possible for societies to arise and advance. Pressing, because our common home needs to be protected. Yet it must also be realized that not all water is life-giving, but only water that is safe and of good quality. Sharing water and sharing the benefits which water brings, in a mutually agreed, equitable and sustainable way is the key to preventing conflicts over this precarious resource. Therefore, water needs to be accorded the central place it deserves in the framework of public policy.

Goals and Aims

The aim of this side-event is to facilitate reflection and discussion on the human rights to water and sanitation as reflected in the SDGs especially with regard to its potential implementation at global, national and local levels and to identify practical recommendations and good practices that aim to facilitate such access. These efforts require solidarity among international actors, States and communities, respect for the

⁴ Address of Pope Francis to Conference on the Human Right to Water, Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 23 February 2017, available at http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/02/24/pope_francis_addresses_vatican_conference_on_right_to_water/1294848

principle of subsidiarity, respect for the justice criteria, and engagement of public and private partnerships, community participation and ownership.

A publication on the same theme, distributed during the side-event, will also serve as a guiding document for future discussions, negotiations, and practical action.

Program

The program and list of speakers of the side-event is as follows:

Moderator

H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See Mission to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva

Introductory Remarks

Dr. David Nabarro, Former Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change

Keynote Speech

H.E. Peter Kodwo Appiah Cardinal Turkson, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation and the Sustainable Development Goals

Mr. Léo Heller, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

Common Good and Common Wealth: Trade and Water

Mrs. Rose Osinde Alabaster, Programme Director, African Region, Waterlex

Private Sector Contribution for the Access to Water for All

Mr. Denis Neymon, Group CEO Treatment Infrastructure, Suez

Water and Migration: How Far would you go for Water?

Mrs. Dina Ionesco, Head of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) Division and co-author of the Atlas of Environmental Migration, International Organization for Migration

Good Practices from Non-Governmental Organizations on the Ground

Mrs. Maria Amparo Alonso Escobar, Head of Caritas Internationalis Delegation to the United Nations in Geneva

Target Audience

Wide participation is invited to the event, including Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva, officials and staff of the UN agencies and other multilateral and intergovernmental organizations, representatives of non-governmental organizations, representatives of the different religious groups, journalists and the general public.

Organizers

- Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Permanent Observer Mission of the Order of Malta to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva
- *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation

Co-Sponsors

- UN Blue Group on Water (Bangladesh, Brazil, Morocco)
- Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations
- Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations
- Permanent Mission of the Republic of Ecuador to the United Nations
- Waterlex
- Geneva Water Hub
- Waterpreneurs
- Caritas Internationalis
- International Catholic Migration Commission
- Forum of Catholic Inspired NGOs in Geneva
- Suez

Translation

Simultaneous interpretation will be available in English and French.

Points of Contact

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