



PRESS RELEASE

THE HUMAN RIGHTS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

On 14th September 2017, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Order of Malta to the United Nations in Geneva and the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation, organized a side-event, in conjunction with the 36th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, on the theme: “The Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation.” The event was based on a publication about the Right to Water prepared by the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation. **His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah TURKSON, Prefect of the Holy See Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development**, delivered the keynote address. A large number of Delegations (among others, Andorra, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Germany, Italy, Maldives, Morocco, Nicaragua, Peru, Spain, USA) and NGOs attended the meeting, which was moderated by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan JURKOVIČ, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva.

The event was opened by **Dr. David NABARRO, former Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change**, who highlighted the importance of successfully implementing the 2030 Agenda by recognizing its common values, where every human being should be able to access basic needs. He pointed out that the 2030 Agenda should follow its principles, being people-centered and planet sensitive. The SDGs should be like an indivisible tapestry and finally he stressed the “leave no-one behind” strategy, where every single person matters. Mr. Nabarro then opened the debate by saying that “for the realization of the SDGs [especially regarding the goal for safe drinking water to all], there is an urgent need to accelerate action at scale.” In his keynote speech, **His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah TURKSON** expressed a global will to formalise and strengthen the access to water and sanitation as a human right. He pointed out that “as a good of creation, water is destined for all human beings and their communities”, and both the Catholic Church and the International Community have given increased importance to this pressing issue during the last decades, with particular reference to the debates related to the fight against poverty and the conservation and exploitation of ecosystems. However, despite the long process of international and intergovernmental negotiations, Cardinal Turkson pointed out that “without solid foundations, our resolutions and declarations of rights are not necessarily respected”. To this aim, for the Catholic Church it has become of utmost importance to raise awareness on the fundamentality and indispensability of water in order “to ground the debate on the right to water and sanitation in its anthropological foundations”. Thus, the right of access to water and sanitation has to be recognized not just as a basic human need but also as “a crucial element of freedom” and entitlement, as a good to which each institution must grant access and supply (“any society that denies the access to water to some, is betraying its most precious human foundations”) and, finally, as a right that necessarily integrates humans and nature, society and ecosystems. This is what Pope Francis calls “integral ecology”. For **Mr. Léo HELLER, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation**, the relationship between SDGs and the human rights dimension is crucial; in the implementation process, however, there are high risks of losing this fundamental linkage. The human rights element should be integrated clearer in the monitoring system to grant equitable access to water and

sanitation. He highlighted that the right to water is one of the few rights explicitly mentioned in the SDGs. As a matter of fact, we assist nowadays to inequalities between indigenous groups and non-indigenous ones, rural and urban zones, etc. Therefore, the aspect of affordability needs to be introduced. If we create gaps between the Agenda and the right to water and sanitation we will not be capable of “leaving no one behind”. **Mrs. Rose Osinde ALABASTER, Waterlex Programme Director for the African Region**, pointed out the role that international and domestic trade play in water accountability. During her presentation, she wondered whether the solution to water scarcity should be to commodify water by creating water markets where water futures can be sold like oil and gas. The human right to water puts people at the centre of all efforts to distribute water resources in a just way, therefore considering “water not only a social and cultural good, but also an economic commodity must not lead to the fact that water as a commodity takes precedence over the human right to water”. In this regard, governments hold a crucial role since they are obliged to give the protection of human rights priority over economic policy and international trade treaties and to ensure non-discrimination in its access. Finally, affordability was presented through the human rights lens, arguing that at the level of securing access, water is rarely priced in ways that reflect supply and demand, thus privatization procedures must be transparent, and they must be carried out in a participatory way. **Mr. Denys NEYMON, Group CEO Treatment Infrastructure of Suez**, presented a private sector perspective to the discussion. He primarily outlined data on the alarming situation of the lack of access to water in some areas, stating that nowadays 5 in 10 people worldwide have no sufficient access to safe drinking water and sanitation. In this regard, the private sector has limited space of action, because “water affair is a political affair, because it concerns cities and social life”. With too many means for limited purposes, private companies have made considerable progress in the past 15 years, and have given high contributions especially in regard to research and innovation in water treatment, thanks to well-qualified experts, who have the ability to train and transfer knowledge to others. Furthermore, he stressed that where Governments have few financial resources, the private sector can bring a short-term solution, even if in the poor countries challenges remain high. **Mrs. Dina IONESCO, Head of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division and co-author of the Atlas of Environmental Migration for the International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, focused on untangling the complex relations between migration, environment, and climate change from a fresh water availability perspective. Over the past ten years great progress has been made in terms of research, policy and action towards a better recognition of environmental drivers in migration strategies, as well as towards an improved understanding of the impact of human mobility on the environment. The impact of climate change should be fully taken into account when speaking about migrants and water, and Mrs. Ionesco expressed her hope that the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) will fully recognize the importance of environmental drivers and in particular of fresh water availability and access as key migration concerns. **Mrs. Maria Amparo ALONSO ESCOBAR, Head of Caritas Internationalis Delegation to the United Nations in Geneva**, focused her intervention on the Caritas Internationalis involvement in water and sanitation as a means for promoting integral human development. “In every continent, Caritas organizations carry out projects to improve access to water and sanitation for poor and vulnerable people” and contributed to the *Caritas in Veritate* publication with case studies from Africa (made by Caritas Malawi, Senegal and Burkina Faso) and from Latin America (brought by REPAM, Red Eclesial Panamazonica). These examples highlighted vulnerability of the enjoyment to the right to water linked to the inequitable allocation of lands, illustrating the challenges caused, among others, by global natural conditions, demographic pressure on sensitive natural resources and limited water services coverage. The implication of Caritas illustrates the importance of achieving a positive impact, and raises recommendations for Governments and the United Nations mechanism to put an end to these dramatic situations.