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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Water Scarcity and Drought and Their Impact on Human Rights in Africa**

### **Background**

Developing African countries suffer from the repercussions of climate change and its multiple effects on all national sectors and daily activities. Human rights are threatened by recurrent climate fluctuations, due to the increase in environmentally damaging practices, which may negatively affect the right to access healthy, clean and potable water. Unsustainable human activities cause climate change, which in turn would push up the rates of natural disasters globally, topped by drought and flooding.

Africa has faced many climate shocks, topped by the drying up of Lake Chad, which was a lifeline for millions of people, leading to the displacement of most of its citizens. Terrorism has also spread widely, which has led to a decline in access to water. The Horn of Africa region is also suffering from recurrent drought and other climate-change-related disasters.

In this context, Elizka Relief Foundation values the Special Rapporteur on Water and Sanitation issuing of a special thematic report on climate change and the human rights to water and sanitation, and thanks Commissioner Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, for highlighting the issue of water scarcity resulting from climate change and its impact on the right to access water in his 2022 report.

### **Elizka would also like to emphasize the following points:**

1. The right to water is one of the basic rights guaranteed to humans, which directly affects and is affected by many other rights such as the right to health, the right to life, the right to adequate housing, equality and justice;
2. The double effect of water scarcity resulting from climate change on vulnerable groups of indigenous peoples, children, the elderly, the disabled, ethnicities, IDPs and migrants;
3. The impact of water scarcity resulting from climate change in Africa on human rights, especially the right to clean water, as follows:

### **First: drought in Lake Chad affects the right to water:**

Lake Chad was one of the largest lakes in Africa, the was considered a lifeline for more than 30 million people in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger, and Nigeria over the past 5 centuries. But over the past six decades, climate fluctuation has dramatically depleted the lake's size and resources. Lake Chad has lost 90 percent of its water volume since the 1960s.(1)The decreasing waters have also become uninhabitable for fish and other marine life, sharply affecting the living conditions of the communities that depend on the lake for their livelihood. (2)

The impact of climate change in the Lake Chad Basin, including warmer temperatures, drought, erratic rainfall, lower water levels, and degraded grasslands, has led to the emergence of two patterns of conflict and violence in the region. First, increased competition for scarce water resources; the second is the increase in human migration.(3)

As a result, 2.3 million people have been displaced from Lake Chad, and more than 5 million are struggling to get enough food and clean drinking water to survive; half a million children suffer from severe acute malnutrition. (4)

It is worth noting that the water supply received by the community in Chad is very low and even when they have access to water, it is likely to be polluted, only 50% of the population has access to potable water and most of the water is used for agricultural activities.

Some women also walk three or four kilometers before waiting for up to three hours in line to bring drinking water for their families, which is exhausting for them. In addition, the aquifers in the Lake Chad Basin are highly vulnerable to pollution and create a serious dilemma for the drinking water supply. Pollution results from improper disposal of waste and can cause water-borne diseases, pollution and water shortages also affect biota and vegetation.(5)

In addition to the above, Boko Haram in West Africa is exploiting these tensions to increase its operations and prey on communities throughout the Lake Chad Basin. In late 2017, more than seven million people were acutely food insecure, due to attacks by Boko Haram, and more than two million people were displaced by the intractable conflict that has plagued the region.(6)

## **Second: Drought in the Horn of Africa**

The people of the Horn of Africa have been forced to migrate due to climatic drought, water scarcity, inter-communal conflicts and other social, economic and political insecurity, for example; drought in Somalia led to mass migration to Ethiopia and Kenya. Daily arrivals of Somali migrants fleeing the drought reached 2,000 in Ethiopia and 1,200 in Kenya. (7)

Statistics show that more than 11.6 million people do not have access to enough water to drink, cook and clean across the Horn of Africa, including 4.4 million in Ethiopia, 3.9 million in Somalia and 3.3 million in Kenya. Many water points have dried up or their quality has diminished, increasing the risks of water-borne diseases and skin and eye infections, as families are forced to ration water use and prioritize drinking and cooking over hygiene.

The current water shortages, due to extremely high temperatures, are expected to continue until September 2022. In some of the hardest-hit areas of Somalia, water prices have risen by as much as 72 percent since November 2021. The need to walk long distances to access water has also increased - in many of cases reaching double or triple the distances they would have to travel during a normal dry season – exacerbating their potential subjection to gender-based violence and drought.

Water shortages also affect infection prevention and control in health facilities and schools. In Ethiopia and Kenya, pregnant women's subjection to infection - resulting in death - increased after childbirth in both the home and health facilities due to the limited availability of water. (8)

## **Recommendations:**

Since the eighties of the last century, the continent has suffered severely from the repercussions of climate change, due to the impact of high temperatures and severe droughts, which affected many human rights, the most important of which is the right to access water. These changes also led to the displacement of people and the harm of vulnerable groups. Elizka Relief recommends the following suggestions:

1. There is a need for the cooperation of the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights, in the context of climate change to launch a special African mechanism aimed at monitoring and following up on the progress achieved and the obstacles faced by the governments of African countries, in line with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and focusing on the extent to which it is achieved Goal 6 and Goal 13 related to climate action and clean water.
2. The Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation should urge international donors to direct their funds towards relief for the most affected groups, especially the displaced, who have difficulty accessing clean and potable water.
3. Elizka calls on the Special Rapporteur on Water and Sanitation to urge the governments of Member States to stop the activities that pollute water and

exacerbate the climate crisis, by issuing a law and specifying a severe penalty for violating this law.

4. Elizka calls the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation to invite the governments of the Member States to establish wastewater treatment projects and plants, especially in light of the scarcity of clean water in most African countries.

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2- Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, "Tackling the Crisis in the Lake Chad Basin," *UNDP Our Perspectives*, February 23, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3JKM88b>

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4- Africa renewal, Drying Lake Chad Basin gives rise to crisis, 24 December 2019, <https://bit.ly/3SEFFjl>

5- Bryanna Lanai Enriquez, Chad: Environmental Issues, <https://bit.ly/3PeIAgE>

6- Ibid

7- Shazia Chaudhry, Perspectives on the Rights of Climate Migrants in the Horn of Africa: A Case Study of Somalia, *JOURNAL OF SOMALI STUDIES*, June 2021, <https://bit.ly/3FNdl8o>

8- Relief web, Horn of Africa Drought: Regional Humanitarian Overview & Call To Action, 4 July 2022, <https://bit.ly/3pf8nJX>