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Report of the 2022 Social Forum*, **

Summary

In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 47/20, the Social Forum on the theme of water for human rights and sustainable development was held in Geneva on 3 and 4 November 2022. The present report contains a summary of its discussions, conclusions and recommendations.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.

** The annex to the present report is circulated as received, in the language of submission only.



I. Introduction

1. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 47/20, reaffirmed the Social Forum as a unique space for interactive dialogue between the United Nations human rights machinery and various stakeholders, including grass-roots organizations and intergovernmental organizations.¹
2. The 2022 Social Forum was held in Geneva on 3 and 4 November 2022. It focused on water for human rights and sustainable development: good practices, lessons learned and challenges in the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, with a view to making a human rights contribution to the conference on the mid-term review of the Decade, to be held in 2023. The President of the Council appointed the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Aurora Díaz-Rato Revuelta, and the Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Maira Mariela Macdonal Alvarez, as the Co-Chair-Rapporteurs of the Forum.
3. The programme of work was prepared under the guidance of the Co-Chair-Rapporteurs and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, with inputs from relevant stakeholders, including Member States and non-governmental organizations. The present report contains a summary of the proceedings, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum. The list of participants is contained in the annex.

II. Opening of the Social Forum

4. The Co-Chair-Rapporteur, Ms. Díaz-Rato Revuelta, said that her country was convinced that the rights to water and sanitation were crucial for human dignity and life, and essential to the eradication of poverty and the strengthening of sustainable development. However, one quarter of the world population still lacked access to potable water. The international community must urgently prioritize Sustainable Development Goal 6 on the global political agenda. The Social Forum would serve to inform the 2023 conference for the midterm comprehensive review of implementation of the Decade for Action (the 2023 Water Conference) from a human rights perspective, providing a plural and diverse space for discussion with a focus on persons in vulnerable situations. She further presented the efforts of Spain in advancing the rights to water and sanitation under the United Nations framework and through its Cooperation Fund for Water and Sanitation for Latin America and the Caribbean, which had benefited more than 3.7 million persons, while promoting a gender perspective in the management of water resources with a special focus on the empowerment of Indigenous women and the effective participation of citizens. Ms. Díaz-Rato Revuelta hoped that the outcomes of the Forum could effectively place human rights on the agenda of the Water Conference.
5. The Co-Chair-Rapporteur, Ms. Macdonal Alvarez, noted that in 2010, the Plurinational State of Bolivia was the promoter of international recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation through General Assembly resolution 64/292, which was reaffirmed by the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 15/9 in September 2010. According to the cosmovision of Indigenous Peoples, water symbolizes life in harmony with Mother Earth, in which it is a common good, access to which should be based on the criteria of equity and social justice. That view and the ancestral practices of Indigenous Peoples and their community-based water management systems should be considered when addressing contemporary global challenges. She recalled people’s struggles in history against the mercantilization and privatization of water, such as had happened in her country at Cochabamba in 2000. Ms. Macdonal Alvarez noted that the objective of the Social Forum

¹ For further details on the Social Forum, see www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForumIndex.aspx.

was to provide the Water Conference with a human rights-centred approach, based on contributions from panellists and participants worldwide.

6. The Vice-President of the Human Rights Council, Andranik Hovhannisyan, noted that water and climate change were inextricably linked. Extreme weather events made water more scarce, more unpredictable and more polluted, threatening sustainable development, biodiversity and people's access to water and sanitation. Over 2 billion people lived in countries experiencing high water stress and about 4 billion people experienced severe water scarcity during at least one month of the year. Everyone was entitled to water and sanitation without discrimination and marginalized groups should not be overlooked by policymakers. Human rights to water and sanitation were key to eradicating poverty, building peaceful and prosperous societies and ensuring "no one is left behind". Unsafe water sources were responsible for 1.2 million deaths each year and accounted for 6 per cent of deaths in low-income countries. Mr. Hovhannisyan reviewed the Council's long history in supporting the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, which were recognized explicitly by the General Assembly in 2010 and reaffirmed in Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 and General Assembly resolution 76/300. He also highlighted the important role of the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation in that regard. He encouraged participants to actively engage in the Forum and bring human rights contributions to the Water Conference in 2023.

7. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that water was the essence of life and should be cherished, treasured and preserved for future generations. One in five people died every day from water-related illnesses and 90 per cent of them were children under five years old. Nearly half the world population lacked access to safely managed sanitation. Extreme weather events exacerbated by climate change made water more scarce, more unpredictable and more polluted. Over 90 per cent of environmental disasters worldwide were water-related. Water had been and would continue to be a source of violent conflict and displacement. The Social Forum provided an opportunity to ensure that human rights were at the core of the 2023 Water Conference and permeated all its five themes.² Cooperative water management must involve the participation of local communities and policymakers must take into account its human rights impacts. People most affected by the lack of access to water and sanitation were real experts on these issues. Water was a global public good; it was not a commodity or service to be managed, but a fundamental human right, to which all people were entitled without discrimination and without which the rights to life, health, food and work would all be jeopardized. The High Commissioner referred to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the guidance provided by its Committee, Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the UN Water road map as blueprints for action. He believed that the Social Forum would also contribute in that regard, making human rights a "game changer" for the Water Conference.

III. Summary of proceedings

A. Keynote panel

8. The Deputy Prime Minister of Cuba and former President of the National Institute of Hydraulic Resources, Inés María Chapman Waugh, noted that more than 2 billion people lived in water-stressed areas; around 3.4 billion human beings, 45 per cent of the global population, lacked access to safe sanitation infrastructure; and 1.6 billion people lacked the necessary infrastructure to access water. Meanwhile, billions were spent on the arms race. Within the framework of the International Decade for Action, it was crucial to unite efforts to guarantee the rights to water and sanitation for the well-being of current and future generations. Ms. Chapman Waugh emphasized that Cuba had the clear political will and the legal framework to promote people's rights to water and sanitation, and presented their achievements in that regard. She noted that the greatest impediment for Cuba in implementing the International Decade for Action was the blockade imposed by the United

² Water for health; water for sustainable development; water for climate, resilience and environment; water for cooperation; and the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, 2018–2028: accelerating implementation.

States of America for over 60 years, which constituted a violation of the human rights of the Cuban people. Ms. Chapman Waugh reiterated her country's availability and support for the implementation of the International Decade for Action in coordination with the international community.

9. The Special Envoy for International Water Affairs of the Netherlands, Henk Ovink, and the Chair of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, Co-Chair of the International Advisory Committee of the Dushanbe Water Process and Special Envoy of the President of Tajikistan to the Water and Climate Coalition Leaders, Sulton Rahimzoda, made a joint statement as co-hosts of the 2023 Water Conference. Mr. Ovink expressed their conviction that the rights to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation were essential to the full enjoyment of all human rights, including gender quality and school attendance. He noted that half the world's population lacked access to a toilet; girls dropped out of school due to a shortage of menstrual hygiene facilities; and hygiene emergencies, such as the recent outbreaks of cholera, could be prevented by universal access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. He called upon all parties to work together to prevent further violations of those rights. Mr. Rahimzoda emphasized the need to ensure access to water, sanitation and hygiene for vulnerable and marginalized people, women, girls, Indigenous Peoples and rural communities. He invited Member States and civil society organizations to provide inputs and mobilize other stakeholders to contribute to the game-changing and transformative commitments for the Water Action Agenda.

10. The Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, noted that the over 2 billion people who lacked access to safe drinking water were not, in the majority, people living in arid areas suffering from water shortages, but extremely impoverished people who lived close to rivers or contaminated waters. The root of this crisis lay in the convergence of two major factors: unsustainability – water had become a vector for diseases and deaths – and poverty and inequality, owing to unjust and immoral socioeconomic systems. People must therefore take action in two directions: recover the well-being of rivers and water systems, from where people got their daily water supplies; and promote the democratic governance of water, whereby water was considered a public good accessible to all but not a commodity. He called on the United Nations to provide a space for global dialogue for defenders of the right to water. He stressed the need for a human rights-based strategy, which would serve as a “game changer” in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 and address the water crisis as a democratic challenge.

11. The Coordinator of the Association of Peul Women and Autochthonous Peoples of Chad, Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, noted that water should be naturally accessible to all communities, although that was far from the reality. For many Indigenous communities and those living in very remote areas, their way of life was not adapted to clean water and sanitation facilities. In some areas of Chad, people drank the same water as their domestic animals or directly from rivers, lakes and wells. Governments and civil society organizations must integrate human rights obligations into their programmes for clean water and sanitation. Indigenous communities should be properly consulted in order that their rights to land and resources be duly protected. Lake Chad, an important water resource for about 4 million people, was shrinking due to climate change, creating more tension between communities. Sharing resources was a key element for peace, security and sustainable development in the area. Human rights encompassed a set of actions to be implemented properly, such as bringing all communities together to manage water resources and finding solutions to conflicts.

12. In his capacity as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, Freddy Mamani Machaca, emphasized that the water crisis threatened sustainability and affected the balance of ecosystems. Water was central to life and to Mother Earth. People must develop measures to ensure the rights to water and sanitation for everyone, particularly for vulnerable people. From the point of view of Indigenous Peoples, water was a living sacred resource. It was part of prosperity and abundance. Through food production, Indigenous Peoples knew that the water cycle was central to the planet and had developed rituals to thank Mother Earth for water. Water was crucial in the multidimensional crisis of food, health, security and climate change facing humanity, which must be addressed holistically through multilateralism. The

experience of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had proved that access to safe drinking water was fundamental in strengthening public health and protecting people against other diseases. The Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean had been chosen to represent Indigenous Peoples at the 2023 Water Conference and had developed a road map for dialogues in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the participation of all stakeholders, to collect experiences and good practices on water use.

13. The winner of the fifth Human Rights Youth Challenge on the human rights to water and sanitation in 2022, Aminta Permpoonwiwat, noted that water scarcity affected 4 in every 10 persons and unsafe water was responsible for 1.2 million deaths each year. Addressing the global water crisis would involve all stakeholders, from individuals to the international community, and the most important agenda was to ensure the basic human rights of access to clean water and sanitation for everyone. In certain communities, women and girls sacrificed their right to work or education to collect water for their families. Climate change exacerbated water shortages. Inadequate management would cause increased competition, leading to devastating losses and crises. Water should not be a commodity but a treasured common good. The private sector could develop and provide technology for all communities through the establishment of public-private partnerships. Youth, as a vulnerable group, needed space and opportunities to become part of the solutions. Ms. Permpoonwiwat called upon all participants to adopt a holistic approach and build a resilient water future for all.

14. During the general discussion, delegates from China, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia, Ukraine, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and the European Union made statements. Representatives of Women's Federation for World Peace International, Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Widows for Peace through Democracy, International Association of Ahmadi Architects and Engineers, China Society for Human Rights Studies and Patriotic Vision also intervened. Participants emphasized that water was indispensable for integral human development. It was closely linked to the three pillars of sustainable development, social, economic and environmental, and was key to eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities. The right to water was foundational to the realization of other economic, social and cultural rights. However, water insecurity hindered people's livelihoods, undermined social and economic progress, impacted social stability and led to conflicts. Water-related climate hazards, such as floods and droughts, changed ecosystems, threatened food security and displaced people. Those impacts were particularly experienced in the least developed countries and small island developing States. Women and girls were disproportionately affected by the lack of proper water and sanitation and should participate in management and decision-making bodies on an equal footing with men. States should adopt integrated approaches in tackling the challenges to implementing Sustainable Development Goal 6. Funding, access to resources, technical assistance and capacity-building were required under a strengthened international cooperation framework.

15. A number of representatives proposed that the 2023 Water Conference should provide an open space for all stakeholders, especially human rights defenders and the most affected people, to identify gaps, find solutions and take concrete actions. Some delegates proposed the appointment of a United Nations special envoy on water. Several delegates condemned the attacks on civilian infrastructures, including water supply systems, by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, which had caused water-related humanitarian crises. Some delegates also denounced unilateral coercive measures by hegemonic powers as a major challenge to targeted States for achieving development. One delegate called for developed countries to take the lead in substantial emission cuts and to stop discharging polluted nuclear water into the sea.

B. Water for health: access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation

16. The Vice-Chair of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Michael Windfuhr, referred to the Committee's general comment No. 15 (2002) as essential to all later developments on the issue of the right to water. It was important to consider the interconnectedness and interdependence of the right to water with other economic and social

rights, including the rights to sanitation, health, food, a safe environment, education and an adequate standard of living. He emphasized the obligations of States to protect people's access to water and to fulfil access to water by vulnerable groups. Investment should focus on those who did not yet have access and were most in need. Drinkable water must be available physically and economically. Mr. Windfuhr considered it important to check the obligations of States in the second half of the International Decade for Action under the universal periodic review and treaty body reviews of States parties. He pointed to three challenges for the future: the impacts of climate change on water, the management of resources to avoid conflicts and taking decisions in a participatory, democratic way.

17. Natasha Dokovska of Journalists for Human Rights, North Macedonia, noted that the right to access to safe drinking water was a basic human right and was a precondition to a quality life. Research by Journalists for Human Rights showed that girls in North Macedonia avoided going to school during their period, primarily because of inadequate conditions for managing menstrual health, and about 30 per cent of women did not have continuous access to menstrual hygiene products. The main reason was the high price of menstrual hygiene products, taxed at 18 per cent. Although Journalists for Human Rights had requested a reduction of the tax rate from 18 per cent to 5 per cent, the Government had not responded favourably. Until the previous year, 74 schools in North Macedonia had not had their toilets renovated for 15 years and other schools for 10 years. In Skopje, outdoor workers did not have any access to sanitation due to the lack of public toilets.

18. Marcela Olivera from Red VIDA, an inter-American citizens' network on water justice in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the enormous inequality in access to water and the urgent need to ensure provision of this common good. The Plurinational State of Bolivia had taken measures at the State level to ensure that nobody was deprived of the basic services of water due to unaffordability, which was commonly seen in other Latin American countries. Globally, most water systems were managed by public institutions and a few by private enterprises, while in Latin America many water bodies were governed by communities themselves. About 70 million people in the region received water from community-based systems. This management model had helped people to better deal with the pandemic and had been replicated elsewhere. It was crucial to adopt the appropriate management model to ensure access to water and its contribution to health.

19. Fatou Diouf Seye, Project Coordinator in Africa for Public Services International and founder of the water justice network in Senegal, noted that there were two different water systems in Senegal: the urban water system and the rural water system. In 1996, water was privatized in cities following pressure from the World Bank and other external factors. The investments came from local taxpayers, but private businesses operated and sold water at high prices, depriving citizens of access to quality water. With water cut off, there was no guarantee of health. In rural areas, water was once decentralized to communities, so that it was sold affordably, and the revenues were invested locally to improve human well-being. However, the country had changed to privatization policies and water prices had doubled, as the foreign companies that were investing had no interest in looking after the communities but rather in making profits. Since Senegal was a poor and highly indebted country, where most of the population lived on subsistence farming, privatization of water had become a disaster, as was the case elsewhere in Africa. Ms. Diouf Seye insisted that water management should be returned to municipalities and communities. Her organization was uniting efforts to combat water privatization, which would result in better health for the people.

20. During the interactive dialogue, representatives of Malaysia and Portugal made statements. Representatives of Polity Link International, Action citoyenne pour l'information et l'éducation au développement durable, Women's Federation for World Peace International, AquaFed, International Human Rights Commission, Consejo Regional para el Desarrollo Sustentable and Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII also made statements. Participants reiterated that in today's world there was still a large population without access to safe drinking water and sanitation, which had serious repercussions for the right to health. Vulnerable and marginalized groups, who faced multiple challenges, suffered more disadvantages in that regard. Governments were responsible for the provision of basic services and must ensure that water supply companies were held accountable. Financial and

material investments were essential to improving the situation. State delegations presented the policies and efforts of their Governments to guarantee the quality of drinking water to prevent diseases caused by unsafe drinking water. One participant provided a concrete example of how in his home city, Guadalajara in Mexico, bad water quality had affected human health. Another observed that legitimate private water operators worked under the control of public authorities and were contractually engaged to deliver on targets 6.1 and 6.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

C. Water for development: valuing water, the water-energy-food nexus and sustainable economic and urban development

21. The General Coordinator of La Via Campesina, Morgane Ody, noted that the floods and prolonged droughts people had experienced around the world in recent months were not natural disasters but the result of a failed development model, due to the lack of political will to preserve water and the water cycle, to ensure fair sharing and to make proper use of water. Fresh water available for human use was relatively scarce, 70 per cent of which was used in agriculture. Farmers had responsibilities towards nature and humanity. She made four main points on water and its usage: to recognize the “right of water” above the right to access to water, which meant to respect the complete water cycle and preserve the balance of nature; to respect the priorities in water use for human needs; to ensure efficient use of water in agriculture; and to prioritize the right to use water over the capitalist logic of making profit out of it. Ms. Ody referred to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas and welcomed the initiative to establish special procedures to implement it.

22. The Director of the Land and Water Division of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Lifeng Li, presented the role of water in sustainable development. Agriculture was the largest sectoral water user, accounting for 72 per cent of human freshwater withdrawals, while industrial water use accounted for 20 per cent. Water use could be economized to produce more agricultural yield. Infrastructures had provided many services but caused environmental impacts. The private sector had become more active in water management. The concept of environmental water need had been integrated into the policies of many countries. Following the work of scientists and policymakers, people’s understanding of the role of water in achieving sustainable development had been deepening. Water management should be integrated into the three dimensions of sustainable development: the environment, the economy and society, and national mechanisms and processes should be in place to ensure such integration at the national level. FAO proposed developing national water road maps for the Sustainable Development Goals by 2023 through a national water dialogue process. The new FAO water journey had launched as a paradigm shift and would hold its milestone event, the Rome Water Dialogue, on 29 November 2022, which welcomed all participants.

23. Miriam Planas from Agua es Vida and Engineering Without Borders noted that the global water crisis was reflected in every aspect of the contemporary social, economic, environmental, democratic and health crises. She proposed four ideas as “game changers” for sustainable global water management. First, people could not continue to understand development as economic growth sustained by the depredation of natural, urban and vital resources. Second, privatization and public-private partnership as models of water management had failed in Latin America and Europe. People should therefore facilitate reappropriation processes by local governments and communities and limit corporate power. Third, people needed to strengthen the public sector through public-public and public-community partnerships, instead of public-private partnerships. Access to information was essential for effective public and community participation. Fourth, continuation of the development model based on maintaining the status quo of industrial growth, combined with climate change impacts, would threaten the water supply for life. A shift was required from a water supply management model to a water demand management model.

24. Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development, Head of the Department of International Law and Director of the Human Rights Centre at the University for Peace, Mihir Kanade, elaborated on the implications of operationalizing the right to development

for realizing the right to water and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6. First, guaranteeing access to water was a necessary condition for the realization of the right to development, as development had been recognized in the Declaration on the Right to Development as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process. Second, the normative framework of the right to development stressed the participation of individuals and peoples in the design and implementation of policies as a human right and not merely as good policy; furthermore, it entailed the obligation of States to realize that right at all levels under the principle of international cooperation as a duty and not as charity. Third, key international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, should stop imposing the privatization of water supply as a conditionality for their loans, because it violated the right to development and was therefore contrary to their obligations to respect human rights as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The essential point was to establish systems through laws, policies and practices, to ensure an enabling national and international environment.

25. During the interactive dialogue, statements were made by a representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, representatives of Association International des Droits de l'Homme et du Développement Social, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, Afghan Wulas, Women's Federation for World Peace International, International Network on Small Hydro Power and Iuventum, and an independent water activist. Participants reiterated that water was a public good and should be equitably accessible to all and that business interests must not prevail over the fundamental human right to water. One participant noted that the privatization of water was usually associated with large international water companies, rather than small-scale local contractors, and that even in countries such as Japan there was significant pressure by such companies to privatize water. Another participant presented the role of small-scale hydropower in providing clean energy in rural areas of developing countries and the work of one organization as a good example of South-South cooperation. One participant called for more attention to be paid to State-led multilateral business initiatives, such as the Valuing Water Initiative spearheaded by the Government of the Netherlands and the legally binding treaty on business and human rights. Another highlighted the water-energy-food nexus, noting that water security was crucial for food and energy production. Participants referred to water shortages in developing countries and the consequent humanitarian crises: in Afghanistan, young people dropped out of school to earn money to buy water; in the Syrian Arab Republic, long-lasting armed conflicts had deprived refugee camps of access to drinking water and international funding was essential to save the situation; in Iraq, the withdrawal of humanitarian organizations had led to severe water shortages, and consequently their continued operations were called for; in Cameroon, even the capital city saw a low percentage of water needs satisfied; and among the 57 countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 29 were undergoing water stress, 18 at critical levels.

D. Water for climate, resilience and environment

26. The Deputy General Secretary for Public Witness and Diakonia at the World Council of Churches, Isabel Apawo Phiri, recalled that the Bible affirmed that water was the cradle of life. Despite the efforts encompassed by the frameworks of the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, there were still about 2 billion people without access to safely managed sanitation facilities. The unsustainable use of water resources was a significant cause of water stress. Climate change had impacts on the water cycle and increased the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, which led to natural disasters. These, in turn, added more stress on access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Water scarcity could also affect the ecosystem. A human rights approach was key to combating water crisis and climate change. The World Council of Churches promoted the concept of "blue communities" that respected the human rights to water, advocated for public control over privatization and cared for the most vulnerable communities. The Council was a "blue community" and had taken concrete actions to implement climate-friendly solutions and build resilient communities.

27. The Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, David R. Boyd, reviewed the multiple impacts of the global water crisis on people's lives, health and human rights. The vulnerable and marginalized were the most affected and needed rapid and systematic remedial actions. The Special Rapporteur referred to his 2021 report to the Human Rights Council on human rights and the global water crisis, in which he had highlighted seven steps that States should take to fulfil their human rights obligations and provided extensive examples of good practices in transboundary cooperation and national policymaking.³ He emphasized that fulfilling the rights to water, sanitation and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Water pollution, water scarcity and water-related disasters were preventable problems and solutions consisted in rights-based water laws, standards and policies, capacity-building programmes, improved technologies and enhanced accountability mechanisms. Investment in sustainable water governance and infrastructure was an obligation with immense benefits and must be scaled up. The World Health Organization had estimated that people gained \$4–\$5 in benefits for every \$1 invested in water. The Special Rapporteur stressed that environmental human rights defenders should be better protected.

28. Seangrawee Suweerakan, from the Network of Indigenous Women in Asia, shared her story of how development projects and climate change had impacted the environment along the Kok River and transformed the lifestyle of eight indigenous groups, including the Shan ethnic group to which she belonged. These people had lived along the river for generations and had learned from their ancestors that “water and forests are life”. However, since the mega development projects of dams and coal mining had been implemented all along the river, environmental damage had occurred, causing landslides and erosion. Some seeds no longer sprouted, tourism had stopped and the water from the river was no longer potable. Local Indigenous young people sought a better life abroad and were losing their traditions. Development projects in a neighbouring country had also caused displacement and forced relocation, giving rise to an influx of illegal immigration. Ms. Suweerakan stressed that development policies must involve consultation with Indigenous Peoples, for whom protecting rivers and forests meant protecting lives.

29. The Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Darío Mejía, noted that Indigenous Peoples saw water as a source of life connected to their territories. Their culture and their own forms of government had allowed them to preserve the biodiversity of ecosystems and the diversity of food systems for centuries. They were at the forefront of water and biodiversity conservation and their knowledge and practices would significantly contribute to solving water scarcity and facing climate change. However, their knowledge and experience had not informed the design of water and climate policies at the national, regional and global levels. The international Water Action Decade must involve the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, with their voices and votes taken into consideration in actions and agendas. Dialogues on water must be linked with other global actions, such as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The market paradigm as a way of living was the main cause of the crisis and seeking solutions therein would not work. Mr. Mejía called for Indigenous Peoples to be actively involved in the 2023 Water Conference.

30. During the interactive dialogue, representatives of Colombia and Malaysia intervened. Representatives of the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Consejo Regional para el Desarrollo Sustentable, Widows for Peace through Democracy, Association for the Human Rights of Azerbaijani People in Iran, Pravo na vodu, Fundecor, Maloca Internationale, La Via Campesina, Women's Federation for World Peace International, International Association of Ahmadi Architects and Engineers and International Human Rights Commission also made statements. One representative highlighted the environmental damage caused by hydroelectric plants, dams and the extractive plantation of exotic trees on the ancestral lands of the Mapuche people in southern Chile and called for the full participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making processes. Another emphasized the decrease in water quantity of Lake Urmia in the north-west of the Islamic Republic of Iran

³ A/HRC/46/28.

and its damaging effects on the ecosystem and human lives. One representative highlighted the deaths of approximately 4,700 local children between 2010 and 2018 due to the heavily polluted water of the Rancheria River in northern Colombia, resulting from a dam project being built by a transnational corporation benefiting energy supply in Europe. Another noted the low rate of less than 5 per cent of plastic recycling in Uganda, which had caused water pollution, soil degradation and a reduction in food production. Another representative highlighted the “water wives”, where men engaged in polygamy in some villages in western India and the only role of the water wives was to bring water from faraway sources to the household. One delegate observed that developing countries faced multiple challenges when balancing their economic development needs and health and environmental goals, and called for enhanced international cooperation on technology. Several participants reiterated the importance of protecting human rights defenders, including peasants and the movements of Indigenous Peoples. Other suggestions included protecting water sources, prioritizing water security over energy transition, making comprehensive public investments and abandoning the industrial agricultural model and the use of chemical products in agriculture. One participant called on the European Union to stop exporting pesticides that were prohibited in the European Union itself.

E. Water for peace and cooperation

31. Oumayma Bouachiri, associative activist and Project Coordinator at Nomad08, the Tunisian observatory of water, noted that 40 per cent of the global population lived in transboundary river and lake basins. Enhancing cooperation in transboundary water management was crucial to ensuring that no one was left behind. Collaboration over shared water resources could be hampered by the devastating impacts of climate change and the lack of effective institutional and legal systems. Algeria, Libya and Tunisia had a long history of cooperation in the management of transboundary water resources through the north-western Sahara aquifer system. One of its achievements was the provision of crucial information and knowledge exchange on hydrology and agriculture. It had also fostered a common identity of shared problems, remedies, responsibilities and deepened trust. All these factors helped to prevent conflict, promote stability and establish a solid foundation for wider political cooperation. However, more action was needed due to the increasing demand for water resources and the impacts of climate change. Nomad08 was ready to further advance transboundary water cooperation at the 2023 Water Conference.

32. Programme Executive and Coordinator of the Ecumenical Water Network at the World Council of Churches, Dinesh Suna, recalled the saying that “the next world war will be fought over water”, which highlighted the importance of water for peace and cooperation. Historically, civilizations grew around water bodies and rivers simply because humans thrived when their water needs were met. Almost all religions had registered episodes about people disputing water resources. The Bible recorded one such conflict over Abraham’s well. More than 260 river basins were transboundary and about 150 water-related treaties had been signed by countries to date. Water was therefore still a cause of conflict and water diplomacy was key to peace and cooperation. The Council had been an intermediary in the recent conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia over the construction of a dam in the upper reaches of the Nile and had contributed to a statement by the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights on the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, calling for the parties to stop using water as a weapon of war. Since 80 per cent of the global population identified with a faith, faith-based organizations had the potential to exert great influence in decision-making.

33. Environmental Affairs Officer of the Water Convention Secretariat at the Economic Commission for Europe, Diane Guerrier, noted that transboundary waters accounted for 60 per cent of the world’s freshwater flows and more than 3 billion people depended on them. Transboundary water cooperation was essential to sustainable development, human and environmental health, biodiversity, climate action and resilience, disaster risk reduction and peace. Progress on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals on transboundary water cooperation was very slow. Only 32 countries had 90 per cent or more of their transboundary basins or aquifer areas covered by operational cooperation arrangements. Rising climate change impacts posed additional challenges for countries wishing to establish

cooperation arrangements. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes was a unique legally binding instrument in promoting the sustainable management of shared water resources. It required States parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts. For the past 20 years, its platform and intergovernmental framework had been supporting countries to address political and technical challenges in transboundary water management, including a focus on adaptation to climate change, the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus and sustainable financing.

34. Luis Fernando Rosales, Coordinator of the Sustainable Development and Climate Change Programme of the South Centre, recalled three water events in the past 20 years: the water war of 2000 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in which participants protested against the privatization of the water supply; the adoption of resolution 64/292 by the General Assembly, recognizing the right to water; and the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 6 on access to water and sanitation. Water as a human right was essential for life and all human rights. Farmers, comprising vulnerable populations, had the fundamental right to use water for subsistence farming to ensure livelihoods, as established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Commodification and privatization of water aggravated tensions and threatened peace. States had a duty to build appropriate legal frameworks to prioritize water for life rather than for corporate interests. Developing countries were the most severely affected by water challenges and should have unhindered access to cutting-edge technologies in water management and sanitation. The human rights legal framework should guide international cooperation.

35. During the interactive dialogue, representatives of Polity Link International, Afghan Wulas, Maat for Peace, Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, ENDA Colombia and Women's Federation for World Peace International intervened. One participant highlighted the important role of education and capacity-building in promoting the rights to water and sanitation, since they provided values, knowledge and skills that empowered people to reflect on and improve their actions. Several representatives highlighted the impacts of climate change on water security, which might lead to conflicts and threaten peace, for example Lake Chad, whose reduction in size had caused tensions among the neighbouring communities living from its water. The drought in Afghanistan had given rise to humanitarian crises of hunger and displacement requiring international assistance. One participant noted that a large percentage of the populations of some African countries, including Eritrea, South Sudan and the Sudan, lacked access to basic clean water services due to the failure to establish proper infrastructure and called for increased funding from international donors and intensive action from their own Governments to change the situation. One representative stressed the link between the right to water and the right to development, emphasizing that for a complete realization of development, access to water and sanitation must be ensured. Another noted that the privatization of water caused social exclusion and real water democracy required States to keep water resources under public control. Community management, as a modality of public management, allowed for participation and conflict mediation.

F. Governance and participation

36. Erina Watene-Rawiri, a member of the Waikato River Authority and Chief Scientist-Maori of New Zealand's Biological Heritage National Science Challenge, shared indigenous insights into water management and co-governance of the Waikato River in New Zealand, home to 77,000 tribal members. In 1863 the Crown invaded Waikato and confiscated 1.2 million acres of land and water. The local people were displaced, excluded from decision-making and denied their rights and interests. It took 132 years of intergenerational negotiations for settlement to be achieved. A co-governance arrangement, the Waikato River Authority, was established between the Crown and the river tribes, consisting of 10 members, 5 appointed by each side. The Authority invested \$NZ230 million over 30 years through a fund for restoration activities. Those included planting more than 3 million native plants, completing 500 km of fencing and restoring 2,130 ha of land. Indigenous knowledge and practices were woven through all aspects of the management of the Waikato River and also informed water policies across the country, such as the National Policy Statement for Fresh

Water Management and the Three Waters Reform Programme (drinking water, storm water and wastewater).

37. The President of Aqueduct Network of Tasco, Colombia, Pedro Abel Castañeda, noted that in his country, community water boards constituted a national confederation and managed 100 per cent of the water supply. Community management was based on solidarity, cooperation and democracy. Mr. Castañeda emphasized that water was not a commodity but a public good that should be cared for and used for human beings, plants and animals. It was important to engage with the authorities to ensure that citizens realized their rights and there was progress in this respect. People sought to prevent pollution caused by inappropriate development policies and opposed extractive projects. They also bought land slots to improve water sources. Their activities included calling for public hearings with the authorities, working with academics to produce pollution-related information and organizing demonstrations to raise awareness of the need for ecosystem protection. They called on the Government to allow them to play a role in protecting water and life for millions of rural and suburban families, recognize their management model and adopt policies to support them.

38. The President of Aqua Publica Europea, Bernard van Nuffel, noted that his organization consisted of over 60 public water operators providing water and sanitation services to over 80 million citizens in Europe. Members believed that since water was a limited common good and its distribution and treatment were provided by a monopoly regime, the public management model was best suited to addressing water management challenges and ensuring that resources were managed in the general interest. Pursuant to the organization's founding charter, public management of water should be based on participatory mechanisms and democratic control, the premier condition of which was transparency. Only by this model, and not the market, could people resolve the critical issues of water shortage, industrial and agricultural pollution, and the inequitable distribution of costs. Following advocacy by Aqua Publica Europea, the European Union drinking water directive incorporated new obligations on transparency.⁴ Mr. van Nuffel emphasized that since water resources belonged to the public sphere, politicians and public authorities had key responsibilities in their good governance.

39. Diane Desierto, Professor of Law and Global Affairs at Notre Dame Law School and Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame, centred her presentation on the question "what role and impact does participation have in water decisions?" and reinforced one concrete point of law: participation as an equal was provided for under international human rights law and was an essential part of governance. Ms. Desierto mapped the legal bases of this right, the deficits under existing international arrangements and the strategies for the way forward. She drew the following three conclusions: first, community participation rights had to be embedded, implemented and made enforceable at every stage of regulatory decision-making on water resource use, including administrative rule-making and administrative decisions, legislation, executive branch enforcement actions and treaty-making. Second, community participation rights must be accompanied by the fullest access to information in order for there to be authentic and effective participation. Tokenism in consultations should be rejected. Third, community participation rights in water governance must intentionally have avenues for holding both governmental officials and private sector operators accountable and having legal redress against them, in order to be taken seriously and equally in the implementation of the human right to water and all related human rights.

40. During the interactive dialogue, the representative of Malaysia made a statement. Representatives of Red Nacional de Acueductos de Colombia, World Youth Parliament of Water, Centre Europe-Tiers Monde jointly with International Association of Democratic Lawyers, Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Consejo Regional para el Desarrollo Sustentable, Observatório Nacional dos Direitos à Água e ao Saneamento, Women's Federation for World Peace International and Engineering without Borders also took the floor. Participants reiterated their opposition to the privatization and commodification of water and opined that priority over water supply should be given to the most vulnerable populations to satisfy their fundamental needs, rather than to industry and big agrobusinesses.

⁴ Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption.

Some also noted that globalization and neoliberalism had weakened the role of States in providing and regulating water, which had in turn affected the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation. Several representatives emphasized the importance of democratic governance of water resources and the need to strengthen public participation. One participant emphasized that the community water management model should be recognized globally as a key model in natural resources management. Another pointed out that language barriers prevented farming communities from fully participating in informational discussions and had resulted in their low representation; and another indicated that the agrobusiness sector as a major user of water should have greater representation in the discussions.

G. Partnerships and commitments for action

41. Anne Le Strat, former Deputy Mayor of Paris and Chair of Eau de Paris, and Senior Adviser to the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance, emphasized the crucial role of local institutions, such as water operators, in implementing the global water and sustainability agendas. Many local governments lacked the resources to invest in capacity-building and the maintenance of existing infrastructure. Water operators' partnerships were peer-support partnerships established between water and sanitation service providers on a non-profit basis, aimed at building capacity and delivering better services. They also fostered the participation of civil society representatives, including trade unions, community groups and users. The Alliance had over the years built up an international network advancing practical and action-oriented approaches. Water operators' partnerships needed to be scaled up and more widely recognized by the relevant technical, financial and political actors. Strengthened involvement of States and local authorities was key to creating an enabling environment for the development of such partnerships. Ms. Le Strat said that it was time to widely adopt field-based effective solutions to address global water challenges.

42. David Boys, Deputy General Secretary of Public Services International, expressed concern about the ability of the United Nations system to integrate the multiple demands of civil society into its water-related policies. Governments should invest more in strengthening their regulatory systems to appropriately control the excesses of the private sector, based on the principles of transparency, accountability and participation. Some trade agreements placed investors' rights above human rights and limited the capacities of States to regulate for their people. Better-managed local authorities and public utilities sourced products and services from the private sector, rather than handing over operations to it. The lifeline policies, which guaranteed a certain amount of water for each person without charge and aimed at protecting the poor, should apply to all people and the related public finance issues should be addressed to ensure investments were made. Lacking fiscal space, the public sector might resort to privatization, but it was important to access information, conduct analysis and involve people in the process. Mr. Boys called upon the United Nations system to be more vocal on financial inequities, such as on resolving debt issues and blocking illicit financial flows.

43. Abishek Narayan, researcher at the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology and Coordinator of Swiss Water Partnership Youth, highlighted the critical role of young people in promoting the rights to water and sanitation. Nearly 50 per cent of the global population was under 30 years old, yet youth were underrepresented in decision-making processes on water, climate and development. Opportunities for youth involvement in water issues had increased recently. Mr. Narayan presented three examples: a Swiss Water Partnership Youth project in Nigeria on a human rights-based approach to health-care facilities, with the creation of a web platform for feedback from patients; the Green Toilet Project, funded by Swiss Water Partnership Youth, to improve school sanitation in rural Brazil; and the Global Youth Movement for Water, comprising 215 organizations working towards the 2023 Water Conference. Enhancing youth involvement required concrete partnerships and commitment, providing knowledge, funding and mentorship. Mr. Narayan called upon the United Nations system and its Member States to create an enabling environment for intergenerational partnerships on water.

44. The Vice-Chair of UN Water, Johannes Cullmann, recognized that human rights organizations were essential partners of the United Nations water mechanism and it was

important to bring the human rights dimension into the 2023 Water Conference in a cross-cutting way. Partnerships were important for addressing global water and sanitation challenges and required three key ingredients: transparency, access and inclusion. Partnership was also an important element to be integrated into the transformative activities or “game changers” of the Water Action Agenda, which would be the outcome document of the 2023 Water Conference. It was imperative to adopt a participatory approach and create greater access for people not represented by the major groups at the Conference. UN Water was ready to contribute to the Conference in the following three aspects: provide everyone with access to the Internet the possibility to participate in the discussions around the “game changers”; help scale up partnerships; and create a follow-up mechanism based on participatory partnership to ensure that promises would translate into impacts for people on the ground. Mr. Cullman encouraged participants to bring human rights to the Water Conference in 2023.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

45. The Co-Chair-Rapporteur, Ms. Díaz-Rato Revuelta, concluded by reaffirming that the Social Forum was a unique space for inclusive and participatory dialogue that would substantially contribute to the 2023 Water Conference. The Social Forum aimed to ensure that human rights would permeate the design and proceedings of the Conference and follow up on its commitments. The Conference would be a special opportunity to improve water governance, renew commitments to sustainable development and enhance international cooperation. Water was a public good and should be made accessible to all. People needed to change the rules of the game and move towards a democratic model for water governance, working with communities and forming partnerships with a human rights and gender focus to ensure access to water.

46. The Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation stated that the institutional weakness of the United Nations system in water management and water ecosystems resulted from the lack of dialogue and active and effective collaboration with human rights defenders. He stressed the need to enhance oversight and follow-up mechanisms, in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, and ensure that mega-projects implanted without the previous consent of local communities were discouraged. He proposed a series of elements for change: protect the defenders of the right to water; recover the sustainability of water ecosystems by green engineering; recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples to manage their water ecosystems; value peasant culture and their practice of circular economy for agro-ecological transition; promote public-community partnerships based on traditional community management of water to care for the poor; enhance youth participation and the empowerment of women; and strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the United Nations and defenders of water. The Special Rapporteur hoped that the Water Conference in 2023 would mark the beginning of a commitment by the United Nations to develop an agenda with water defenders and called upon participants to celebrate an unprecedented World Water Day with a demonstration promoted by those defenders and led by Indigenous Peoples on 22 March 2023 in New York.

47. On behalf of Tajikistan and the Netherlands as co-hosts of the 2023 Water Conference, Mr. Ovink underlined three points: first, meaningful and impactful participation meant including the 2 billion people on the frontlines of water insecurity, especially marginalized people and defenders of water. Second, people needed a human-rights based approach. The rights to water and sanitation comprised the foundations of the enjoyment of all other human rights and were key to achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals. Third, people must share experiences and learn from inspiring examples and good practices worldwide. Mr. Ovink concluded that the forthcoming Water Conference would be an inclusive space to build trust and set up transformative actions for water security for all. He expressed his readiness to work together with the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation on this collective mission.

48. The Co-Chair-Rapporteur, Ms. Macdonal Alvarez, highlighted the unique nature of the Social Forum, during which participants had held a diverse, participatory and people-

centred discussion on the right to water. She reiterated the historic position of the Plurinational State of Bolivia on the right to water, whereby water was considered a public good and not a commodity, and stressed that Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and practices in the management of water resources were an invaluable contribution to humanity. She concluded by emphasizing the need to address the challenges facing all humanity and future generations. Ms. Macdonal Alvarez believed that the ideas shared at the Social Forum would be at the heart of the Water Conference.

49. The following conclusions and recommendations emerged from the Social Forum, as identified by the Co-Chair-Rapporteurs.

A. Conclusions

50. **Water is a global public good. Access to safe, affordable and reliable drinking water and sanitation services are basic human rights. All people in all countries are entitled to these rights without discrimination.**

51. **Without the rights to water and sanitation, all human rights, such as the rights to life, health, food and work, are in jeopardy. The human rights to water and sanitation are key to eradicating poverty, building peaceful and prosperous societies, and ensuring that "no one is left behind" along the pathways to sustainable development.**

52. **Nearly 2 billion people lack access to potable water. The majority do not live in arid areas suffering from water shortages, but in extremely poor conditions close to rivers or contaminated waters. The reason for their lack of access is the convergence of water unsustainability, poverty and inequality caused by unjust socioeconomic systems.**

53. **Nearly 3.6 billion people lack access to safely managed sanitation. Unsafe water sources are responsible for 1.2 million deaths each year and account for 6 per cent of deaths in low-income countries.**

54. **People with disabilities, women and girls, and people living in rural areas suffer the most from insufficient, contaminated and unsafe water supplies.**

55. **Menstrual hygiene management requires great attention. Women and girls are 50 per cent or more of the population, users of services and de facto sanitation managers, and 52 per cent of women are of reproductive age. If hygiene management is not guaranteed, access to and permanence in schools, work and social participation are limited.**

56. **Transboundary waters account for 60 per cent of the world's freshwater flows and over 3 billion people depend on them. Over 260 river basins are transboundary and approximately 150 water-related treaties have been signed. Water is still a cause of conflict. Transboundary water cooperation is essential to promoting sustainable development and sustaining peace.**

57. **About 70 per cent of the fresh water available for human use is utilized for agriculture. Farmers, especially small-scale farmers, could offer vital contributions to nature and the environment.**

58. **The public management model could address water management challenges and ensure that resources are managed in the general interest. Public management of water should be founded on participatory mechanisms and democratic control, with transparency at the core. Access to information is essential for effective public participation.**

59. **In expanding the provision of water and sanitation services, private water operators should work under the control of the public authorities. They should be engaged under contract to deliver and increase access to safe drinking water and sanitation.**

60. **States have obligations to realize people's rights to water and sanitation, which include protecting people's existing access to water; ensuring that third parties involved in the governance of water do not hinder the exercise of those rights; and making**

additional specific investments to fulfil the rights of people who are marginalized or in the most vulnerable situations.

61. Water and climate change are inextricably linked. Extreme weather events make water more scarce, more unpredictable and more polluted. Those impacts throughout the water cycle threaten sustainable development, biodiversity and access to water and sanitation.

62. Although most water systems globally are managed by public institutions and others by private enterprises, some Latin American countries have broadly successful experience in community-based water management systems.

63. In many African countries, privatization of water has caused a significant rise in water prices, making it unaffordable for most of the population.

64. Unilateral sanctions limit the capabilities of targeted States to discharge their obligations in promoting the rights to water and sanitation.

65. From the world view of some Indigenous Peoples, water is life itself and is essential for the realization of living well in harmony with Mother Earth. Indigenous Peoples' conception of water and their ways of managing and using it should be respected.

66. Since Indigenous Peoples are at the forefront of water and biodiversity conservation, their knowledge and practices will significantly contribute to solving water scarcity and facing climate change.

67. Since 80 per cent of the global population identify with some faith, faith-based organizations have the potential to become influential actors in a human rights-based approach to water policymaking.

68. Water pollution, water scarcity and water-related disasters are preventable problems and the tools for their solution are known: a human rights-based approach to water laws, standards and policies; capacity-building programmes; improved equitable access to technologies; and enhanced accountability mechanisms.

69. Two challenges must be tackled to address the global water crisis: recover the well-being of water systems and promote a human rights-based approach to water governance.

70. Respect for the complete water cycle and the preservation of the balance of nature are inherent aspects of the right to health and are obligations under the rights to water and sanitation.

B. Recommendations

71. A critical, constructive and diverse perspective will serve to understand progress towards and challenges to the full and equal realization of the human rights to water and sanitation.

72. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6, access to water and sanitation for all, should be a priority on the global political agenda.

73. Human rights must be at the centre of the preparation, design and outcomes of the 2023 Water Conference and should permeate all five of its themes. A human rights-based approach to water governance could be a "game-changer" for the Water Action Agenda. That means promoting strategies for addressing the sustainability problems of aquatic ecosystems and preventing and adapting to climate change. It involves addressing water management in agriculture, industry or various urban uses from a holistic perspective and prioritizing the human rights to drinking water and sanitation for all, in particular for the most impoverished people and for environmental sustainability.

74. An inclusive and participatory approach to the 2023 Water Conference is essential for creating greater access for people who are most affected by the lack of

access to water and sanitation and not traditionally represented by major groups and defenders of the right to water.

75. When addressing water-related issues, the United Nations system and its Member States should enhance their dialogue and cooperation with defenders of the rights to water and sanitation, including those from Indigenous, peasants' and women's networks and organizations. Engaging with social movements will strengthen and expand the United Nations vision for water and sanitation and support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6, particularly for persons and communities in situations of vulnerability.

76. A follow-up mechanism, based on participatory partnership and informed by human rights principles, must be established to ensure that the promises of the 2023 Water Conference translate into effective actions that ensure the enjoyment of human rights by all. Instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Living in Rural Areas, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure and Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication should be widely disseminated. Effective protection must be accorded to human rights defenders, in line with the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). The monitoring of human rights mechanisms must be strengthened, including the work of the special procedure mandate holders, and this issue must be integrated into the universal periodic review and reviews by the treaty bodies.

77. Satisfying unconditionally the need for water to maintain industrial growth and large-scale agriculture is not sustainable and threatens the water supply for life. Priorities for water for personal and domestic use should be respected. States must fulfil their duties to build appropriate legal frameworks to prioritize the human rights to water and sanitation.

78. Since water resources belong to the public sphere, politicians and public authorities must discharge their essential responsibilities for its good governance, including addressing corruption in water management. Well-managed public utilities invest in public services rather than handing over operations to the private sector. Investment in sustainable water governance and infrastructure is an obligation and should be urgently scaled up.

79. Developing countries are the most severely affected by the water crisis and need equitable access to cutting-edge technologies to improve their water and sanitation management. International cooperation in line with the human rights legal framework must be strengthened in this regard.

80. Key international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have obligations under international human rights law to enhance and not negate human rights, and ensure an enabling national and international environment to respect those rights. They should not impose the privatization of water and sanitation as a conditionality on loans, grants or technical assistance, which is contrary to their obligations to respect human rights.

81. Recognizing, respecting and promoting the right of Indigenous Peoples to manage their aquatic ecosystems using their worldviews, traditional practices and knowledge of their territories, contributes to preserving ecosystems and are an expression of democratic water governance that leaves no one behind.

82. Development policies, in particular, should involve consultations with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, who are those most affected by such policies. Opportunities for them to share their experiences, knowledge and solutions should be guaranteed.

83. States and the international community should ensure that human rights defenders who promote the rights to water and sanitation are protected from threats and attacks.

84. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of proper water and sanitation. Women's participation on an equal basis with men in decision-making and strategies to manage water and when planning the management of rivers and aquifers must be ensured. Women's and girls' active involvement in water issues not only takes their knowledge into account, but also their needs. Safe spaces for women and their organizations must be facilitated to enable their active involvement.

85. Youth should have more space and opportunities to participate in discussions and decision-making processes. Knowledge-sharing, funding and mentorship are key for enhancing youth involvement.

Annex

List of participants

States Members of the Human Rights Council

Armenia; Bolivia (Plurinational State of); Brazil; Cameroon; China; Cuba; Czech Republic; Côte d'Ivoire; Finland; France; India; Libya; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malawi; Malaysia; Mexico; Nepal; Netherlands; Poland; Qatar; United States of America; Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

States Members of the United Nations

Angola; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Burkina Faso; Chile; Colombia; Croatia; Cyprus; Dominican Republic; Egypt; El Salvador; Estonia; Greece; Hungary; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Iraq; Italy; Jamaica; Jordan; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Lesotho; Maldives; Nigeria; North Macedonia; Pakistan; Panama; Peru; Portugal; Romania; Russian Federation; Saudi Arabia; Serbia; Sierra Leone; Slovakia; Slovenia; South Africa; Spain; Syrian Arab Republic; Tajikistan; United Republic of Tanzania; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Togo; Türkiye; Ukraine.

Non-Member States represented by observers

Holy See.

United Nations

Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Labour Organization (ILO); Office of the United Nations High-Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); UN-HABITAT; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR); United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS); United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII); United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO).

United Nations human rights mechanisms

Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development.

Intergovernmental organizations

African court on human and people's rights; European Union; International human rights commission (IHRC); Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); South Centre; World Trade Organization (WTO).

National and subnational human rights institutions

National Human Rights Commission of Mauritius.

International organizations of parliamentarians

World Economic Forum; World Youth Parliament for Water.

Other entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers

Sovereign Order of Malta.

Academic institutions

American University; Carleton University; Centro de Pesquisas de Águas Subterrâneas (CEPAS/USP); Fatima Jinnah Women University; Federal University of Rio de Janeiro; Fiocruz; Foro de la Economía del Agua; Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID); Geneva Water Hub; IHE Delft Institute for Water Education; International Association of Computer Science in Sport (IACSS); International Committee for Indigenous Peoples; La Coordinadora Nacional Agua para Todos Agua para la Vida; Lumsa University; McMaster University; Morgan State University; Pulte Institute for Global Development; Roma Tre University; Sarhad University of Science & Information Technology; Taha Enterprises; Universidade do Rio Grande do Norte; Universidade Federal da Bahia; Universidade Federal de Pernambuco; Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro; Université de Lille; Université du CEPROMAD de Bunia; University for Development Studies; University for Peace; University of Bern; University of Geneva; University of Minnesota; University of Notre Dame; University of São Paulo; University of Vermont; Webster University Geneva.

Non-governmental organizations and others

Aalamaram-banyan Tree; Abiodun adebayo welfare foundation; Action Citoyenne pour l'Information et l'Éducation au Développement Durable; Action pour le Respect et la Protection de l'Environnement; Advocates for the Environment; Inc.; Africa Forest Forum, Africa water justice network; Agua é Vida; Akinade Nigeria limited; Amis des Étrangers au Togo (A.D.E.T.); Amman Center for Human Rights Studies; Amuas Asociación de Mujeres Unidas por el Agua y Saneamiento en Bolivia; Aqua Publica Europea; AquaFed – International Federation of Private Water Operators; Asociación Acueductos Comunitarios de Tasco – Red de Acueductos Comunitarios de Colombia; Asociación Española de Operadores Públicos de Abastecimiento y Saneamiento (AEOPAS); Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente; Associação Brasileira de Engenharia Sanitária e Ambiental (ABES); Associação Das Mulheres Para Paz Mundial; Associação de Jovens Engajamundo; Association “Paix” pour la lutte contre la Contrainte et l'injustice; Association Aide aux Femmes et Enfants; Association des Nations Unies pour le Tchad; Association for Rural Area Social Modification; Improvement and Nestling; Association for the human rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran (AHRAZ); Association Humanitaire Al Hayat; Association mauritanienne pour la promotion des droits de l'homme; Association mondiale pour l'école instrument de paix; Association nationale de promotion et de protection des droits de l'homme; Association pour le Développement Communautaire et la Promotion de l'Éducation; Association pour le avenir des autochtones et de leur connaissance originelle (ADACO); Association pour les Victimes Du Monde; Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII; Autonomous Non-profit Organization for the Development of Information; Industry and International Cooperation “Integration”; Banka Biolo Limited; Blue Community Switzerland; Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn; Blue planet project; Bread for the World; B-team Security; Business and Human Rights Resource Centre; Carbon Pulse; Center for Environmental and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED); Centre d'accompagnement des alternatives locales de développement; Centre de formations études et recherches pour le développement; Centre Europe – Tiers Monde; Centre for Indigenous Child Rights; China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation; China NGO Network for International Exchanges (CNIE); China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS); Christian fellowship and care foundation; Centre Independent de Recherches et d'Initiatives pour le Dialogue (CIRID); Colectivo Solidario de Ginebra; Collectif Breakfree; Collectif des Leaders pour le Développement Durable de l'Afrique (CLDA); Comité UNICEF Paris; Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches; Consejo Regional para el Desarrollo Sustentable; Convention pour le bien être social; Coordination de la Jeunesse Africaine (CJA); Copasa

Mg; Cycle de Montbrillant; Dalit Women Upliftment Center; Défenseurs Sans Frontières; Délégation Générale Wallonie-Bruxelles; Dirigentes de mi Comunidad (DICOMU); Dominican Leadership Conference; Enda Colombia; Engagement citoyen pour la promotion de la paix et le développement; European Youth Center of Vojvodina; European Youth Parliament for Water (EYPW); Evalutile; Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV); Fireside communication; Fondation des Oeuvres pour la Solidarité et le Bien Être Social – FOSBES ONG; Fondation pour un Centre pour le Développement Socio-Eco-Nomique; Forum Anwal pour le Développement et la Citoyenneté; Franciscans International; Fundación Amigos del Río San Juan (FUNDAR); Genève pour les droits de l’homme: formation internationale; Geoplanet; Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF); Global digest; Global Forum for the Defense of Human Rights Association; Global Strategic Institute for Sustainable Development (GSISD); Global Youth Biodiversity Network; Good Deeds Ottawa Canada; Hamraah Foundation; Heks Eper; Helping Children Inc; House of Culture, Arts & Heritage; Human Rights Sanrakshan Sansthaa; Imider Environmental Movement; Ingeniería para el desarrollo humano (ONGAWA); Institute for Global Dialogue and Culture of Encounter; International Association for Human Rights and Social Development (AIDHES); International Committee for the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas; International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); International Council of Women; International Human Rights Commission Relief Fund Trust; International Human Rights Council; International Human Rights Observer (IHRO) Pakistan; International Movement ATD Fourth World; International Network on Small Hydro Power; International Rivers; International Secretariat for Water; International Water Association (IWA); International Association of Ahmadi Architects & Engineers (IAAAE); Internet Society; ISIS – Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange; iuventum e.V.; Journalists for Human Rights; La via Campesina; Les Congolais Debout International; Liberian United Youth for Community Safety and Development; Literary Academy for Dalit of Nepal; Locana; Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association; Maloca Internationale; Mengo Youth Development Link (MYDL); Musique Universelle Arc-En-Ciel; Network of Indigenous Women in Asia; New Culture of Water Foundation; Nizam Trading; Nomad 08; Non-Aligned Movement Youth Organization; Ntamayuk Foundation; Oak foundation; Oanda consulting; Observatório Nacional Direito Água e Ao Saneamento – ONDAS; Omnia: Institute for Contextual Leadership; Organisation Mondiale des Associations pour l’Education Prénatale; Oxfam America; Pakistan Rural Workers Social Welfare Organization (PRWSWO); Patriotic Vision; Peace at All Cost; Practice Lead Water Stewardship (Bhp); Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia; Public Services International; Qintheory Studio; Red Agua Publica; Red Nacional por la Defensa de la Soberanía Alimentaria en Guatemala Redsag; Red Vida; Red Wiphalas / Wiphalas Network; Réfugiés; Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung – Gesellschaftsanalyse und Politische Bildung e.V.; Rural Aid Pakistan; Sabmer Charity and Empowerment Foundation; Shah Muqem Trust; Social Development Foundation; Solidariedade Na Mokili; Solidarités International; South Africa Youth Parliament for Water; Stichting Mission Lanka; The Center for Water Security and Cooperation; The Unforgotten Fund; Ukrainian Human Rights Center; Union des Nations pour l’Enseignement, la Science Universelle et les Droits de l’Homme; UNISC International; Waikato River Authority; New Zealand Bioheritage Science Challenge; Te Wai Māori Trust; Wash United gGmbH; Water for Life; Water Museum of Queretaro; Women, Youth & Kids Empowerment Initiative (WYKEI) for Sustainable Peace & Development CIC; Women’s Federation for World Peace International; World Association for the School as an Instrument of Peace; World Council of Churches; World Youth Parliament for Water; Youth Maggas Organization for Sustainable Development; Zonta International.

Independent participants

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