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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.

[22 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The Right to Safe Drinking Water

Access to safe and healthy drinking water is a fundamental human right. People depend on water for drinking, maintaining public hygiene, irrigating crops, caring for livestock, in addition to household uses for cooking food and recreational purposes. Therefore, poor access to sufficient, clean water negatively impacts the lives of citizens, threatens the occurrence of humanitarian disasters, whether at the health or nutritional level, and thus exacerbates poverty. In this regard, water shortage-related humanitarian disasters exacerbate in the Middle East region. Different areas inside the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq suffer from possible humanitarian disasters as a result of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey controlling the tributaries of the rivers passing through the two countries. In southwestern Iran, the government diverted water from Arab ethnic minority's areas to Persian majority areas, leading to increased rates of thirst and a shortage in crops. On the other hand, there is a tangible fear of the unilateral filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in the Nile Basin countries, especially between Egypt and the Sudan. The unilateral filling of the dam threatens the right of citizens to obtain drinking water and the citizen's food security. Accordingly, this intervention sheds light on the right of citizens to access safe water in light of the practices of Turkey, Ethiopia and Iran, and the resulting violations and humanitarian disasters that directly impact the lives of civilians.

Turkey cuts off Euphrates water to Syria and Iraq

Human rights estimates monitored in May 2021 images of the decline and fall of the water level of the Euphrates River to alarming levels. The maximum level of the river water decreased from 325.20 to 320.70 meters, with a decrease of more than 4 m3. That is due to the Turkish government reducing the quantities of water entering the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which enhances the decline in the share of Syrians and Iraqis from the waters of the two rivers, leading to an environmental, economic, and legal disaster threatening the lives and livelihoods of more than three million Syrians, who depend on the river for drinking water, electricity, irrigation, and fishing. In the meantime, the southern Iraqi governorates such as Basra, Nasiriyah, and Maysan will suffer from a severe shortage in drinking water. The Iraqi agricultural sector will also be affected; Iraq will lose a third of its arable land, in conjunction with the spread of drought and desertification.

On the other hand, the armed factions affiliated with the Turkish government are cutting off water supplies to the most vulnerable areas in Syria that are under their control. In particular, the water was constantly cut off from the Alouk water station in the countryside of Ras al-Ain, from June 23, 2021, to July 30, 2021. That threatens the water rights of more than 460,000 Syrian people who depend on the plant to obtain drinking water and maintain public and personal hygiene in light of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since November 2019, the station has been disrupted at least 24 times due to the practices of these factions.

In the same context, the city of Al-Bab people, which is under the Turkish-backed factions, East of Aleppo, launched appeals and a campaign entitled "People in Al-Bab are Thirsty" after most of the wells in the area dried and the water was cut off. That may exacerbate the suffering of 250 thousand people, most of them are displaced.

Iran uses water to achieve its goals, regardless of human rights considerations

The citizens of the Arab-majority Ahwaz province in southwestern Iran face an imminent humanitarian threat. The government is diverting the course of the Karun River away from their areas towards Isfahan and Zayandroud, which are predominantly Persian, and build more dams on the Karkha and Karun rivers during the past years. That put citizens at risk of thirst and exacerbated the food crisis due to the lack of water needed to irrigate agricultural lands and the displacement of many citizens of these areas due to water shortages.¹ Angry

¹ Iran, Ahwaz Arabs are rising up against systematic thirst, Sky News <https://bit.ly/3lyu0nX>.

citizens came out on July 16, 2021 in the streets of Al-Ahwaz to protest the scarcity of water available for daily use, agriculture, and grazing in the region, which threatens to cause humanitarian crises. Instead of taking urgent measures to address water shortage, the Iranian government has relentlessly suppressed the demonstrations, causing the deaths and injury of many demonstrators.² Over 12,000 Iranian villages suffer from chronic thirst. 5,000 Iranian live without water resources, 7,000 receive water by tankers, and 4 million Iranians suffer from water scarcity; due to the Iranian government's discriminatory policies in granting water to groups and preventing it from other groups, especially the non-Persian ethnic minorities.³

Iraq also complains about Iran's repeated violation of their water rights; Iran controls the flow of water in the Sirwan, Karun, and Karkha rivers, which supply water to eastern Iraq, especially the Diyala Governorate. Therefore, the interruption of water from these areas threatens the lives of more than 7 million Iraqis in the governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Diyala, Salah al-Din, and Wasit.⁴ Besides, citizens in Basra Governorate, southern Iraq, are vulnerable to water shortage and food insecurity due to the lack of water needed for irrigation as a result of Iran's cutting water from the Karun River, which leads to a decrease in the water levels of the Shatt al-Arab.⁵ Despite the Iraqi government's threat to take international action against Iranian practices that encroach on Iraq's water share in the rivers shared between it and Iran on July 11, 2021, the Iranian disregard of the problem, in addition to the international silence, still prevails, despite the citizens facing an unprecedented drought crisis and internal displacement due to lack of water as well as threats to food security of citizens.⁶

The unilateral filling of the GERD will cause severe effects on the Nile Basin countries

The Human rights studies conducted by the Nile for Peace Initiative indicate that the Ethiopian government's unilateral policies and procedures to fill the GERD have negative economic and social effects on the Nile Basin countries. Filling the dam and decreasing water shares without a reaching a legally-binding agreement that protects the rights of all parties will threaten citizens access to water and cause a significant drop in the per capita share of freshwater, along with the decrease of arable land in both Egypt and the Sudan. The arable land in Upper Egypt will be decreased by 29.47% and in the Delta by 23.3%. The dam will lead to the emergence of ponds and swamps in the Sudan, which hinders agriculture and access to clean water, and threatens both countries with food insecurity. Internal displacement is likely to occur in large parts of the Sudan and Egypt's Nuba.⁷

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, Turkish, Iranian, and Ethiopian governments' practices affect citizens' rights to safe water and associated activities. Thus; we call on:

The Turkish government:

Increase water amounts in the Euphrates River by about 500 cubic meters per second, as agreed upon in international conventions and treaties, and to stop targeting the Alouk station in northeastern Syria by armed factions and to put it away from the political conflict.

The Iranian government:

² We are thirsty. Police fire live bullets at protesters to confront the water shortage crisis in Iran, France 24 <https://bit.ly/3fybske>.

³ Iran loots Iraq's water share and faces thirst, Mecca, <https://bit.ly/3fBBX8b>.

⁴ Iran cuts off water from Iraq and Baghdad's options are limited, Aske News, <https://bit.ly/3rTqxS4>.

⁵ Turkey and Iran race over the waters of Iraq The thirst of Mesopotamia is at the door, Iraq Alter <https://bit.ly/3juvkG5>.

⁶ Iraq threatens international action. Iran has completely cut off the water, Iraq Alter. <https://bit.ly/3CkcYzR>.

⁷ The effects of the unilateral filling of the Renaissance on the Nile Basin countries, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, <https://bit.ly/3xrrt1t>.

Find a solution to the water problem in Ahwaz, return the Karun River to their areas, supply Iraq with its water share and stop attacking it.

The Ethiopian government:

To stop the unilateral filling of the GERD while ensuring the signature of a legally-binding and just agreement that guarantees the rights of the Nile Basin countries in a manner that does not harm the Egyptian or Sudanese water and food security.
