



Water and conflict: *Addressing water insecurity issues in fragile and conflict-affected countries*

CONCEPT NOTE

Side Event to the 78th session of the UN General Assembly

October 20, 2023 / 13:15 – 14:45

Hybrid event in New York (Conference Room 7 at UNGQ) and online

The consequences of armed conflict on access to water and on overall public and environmental health continue to have detrimental impacts on millions of people around the globe. These impacts are widespread and complex, often of a transboundary nature, and increasingly compounded by climate change. On the one hand, water resources have been used as a weapon of war by parties to conflicts in both domestic and international settings. On the other hand, water shortages and failing water management issues have further fueled conflicts and exacerbated clashes between the domestic communities, as demonstrated by growing inter-communal tensions over scarce water resources.

While the challenges around conflict-related water insecurity have been widely recognized, water resources and infrastructure continuously fail to be properly protected and addressed by armed actors and in post-conflict recovery efforts. At the same time, there is growing recognition among the international community of the need to enact more effective regulations to protect water resources and to address the water security issues in conflict settings, as witnessed by the discussions at the UN Water Conference earlier this year. Moreover, in October, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation will present his report to the 78th session of the UN General Assembly on the rights to water and sanitation as a tool for peace, prevention and cooperation.

During UNGA78, States should establish a comprehensive UN-system-wide Environment, Peace and Security (EPS) agenda to improve international prevention, mitigation, and response efforts to environmental damage in conflicts, including those involving water resources. Such an EPS agenda must prioritize: (1) preventing and minimizing the environmental and derived humanitarian consequences of conflicts; (2) identifying, monitoring and responding to environmental consequences; and (3) the inclusion of the environment as an essential component of sustainable peacebuilding programs. Access to water and water-related essential services has, however, also an important social and socio-economic dimension, which should also be taken into account.

Objectives of the event

The aim of this event is to raise international awareness on the most pressing challenges around the vulnerability of water resources in armed conflicts and provide policy recommendations to improve the protection and management of water ecosystems in fragile and conflict-affected countries. The event will feature the presentation of the findings from the UN Special Rapporteur's forthcoming report, with additional research from civil society actors and international organizations on the relationship between water, conflict, climate and the environment. The discussion will bring together representatives from States, the UN, humanitarian organizations, academia, and civil society, including those from water-fragile and conflict-affected countries. Participants will seek to identify ways to

improve international approaches to the protection of water resources in conflict and the facilitation of access to water by affected communities, as well as to explore opportunities for environmental peacebuilding around water resources.

Format

The event will be held in an in-person/hybrid format. Following welcoming remarks, the panel will begin with introductions by the moderator and briefings from selected featured expert discussants representing international organizations and civil society. The panel will be followed by the floor opening to other participants who may wish to make interventions.

List of Speakers

Opening remarks:

- **Ambassador Boštjan Malovrh**, Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the UN
- **Ambassador Adrian Hauri**, Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN or **Riccarda Chanda**, Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN
- **Representative of Mozambique tbc**

Keynote address:

- Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, **Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo**

Moderator:

- **Ms. Natasha Hall**, Senior Fellow with the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies

Panel discussion:

- **Dr. Mara Tignino**, Lead Legal Specialist, Geneva Water Hub and Reader, Faculty of Law and Institute for Environmental Sciences, University of Geneva
- **Mr. Wim Zwijnenburg**, Humanitarian Disarmament Project Leader for PAX
- **Mr. Ernesto Granillo**, UNICEF Humanitarian Advocacy and Policy Specialist
- **Mr. David Kaelin**, ICRC Urban Services Adviser in the Water and Habitat department (*via online participation*)
- **Ms. Simav Hasan**, Advocacy and Communications Officer at Syrians for Truth and Justice (*via online participation*)
- **Mr. Salman Khairalla**, Co-Founder and Executive Director at Tigris River Protector Association | Humat Dijlah (*via online participation*)