

PGA Preparatory Meeting of the UN 2023 Water Conference
25 October 2022

Exchange of views with participating states and relevant stakeholders on the themes of the Interactive Dialogues of the UN 2023 Water Conference - 11h05-13h00 (EDT)

Statement by Dr. Mara Tignino on behalf of the Geneva Water Hub

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the floor,

Dear colleagues,

I'd like to share with you the key take-aways from the [Expert Opinion](#) that the Geneva Water Hub and partners under Finland submitted in preparation of the United Nations 2023 Water Conference. One of its key recommendations is to enhance the protection of water – and therefore people - before, during and after armed conflicts.

This protection is a necessary pre-condition to ensure the rights of the civilian population are respected, especially those of vulnerable groups such as women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities. These groups are usually the most affected by the reverberating effects of damaged infrastructure, the disruption of WASH services, and the deterioration of the water-dependent ecosystems. As stated by UNICEF, children in protracted crisis are 3 times more likely to die from water related diseases than from the violence itself. With all that we've learned over the last few decades, water really should be off-limits to combatants – like schools and hospitals.

Despite this, the protection of water receives little attention by States. The Interactive Dialogue on Water for Cooperation provides a unique opportunity to advance here. The Interactive Dialogue must clearly recognize water cooperation includes keeping water outside an armed conflict and that all parties to an armed conflict (including non-state actors) must respect the principles and rules of international humanitarian law (IHL) in the conduct of hostilities and in occupied territories.

There are at least three commitments States should consider taking:

- Commit to support the inclusion of the attacks against WASH facilities as a grave violation in the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations committed against children in times of armed conflict;
- States could also commit to align domestic legal frameworks, including military manuals, with the principles of IHL or the Rules of War;
- States should also commit to build the evidence base of the links between armed conflict, damaged water systems, and public health.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must ensure that water and sanitation systems are never used as means or method of warfare. Under its motto “Spare water, share water – for peace” the Geneva Water Hub aims to ensure a better implementation of IHL rules on water before, during and after armed conflicts.

I thank you, Mr President.