



Geneva Peace Week (GPW)

30 October-4 November 2023

Policy Briefing

Water as a tool for peace: bridges between the human right to water and the prevention of conflicts

31 October 2023

11h00-12h30

Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)

Maison de la paix, Geneva

Co-organizers



Background

The human rights to drinking safe water and sanitation are a prerequisite for the realization of all human rights. It is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. Ensuring access to water and sanitation for all is necessary to support livelihoods and facilitate post-conflict recovery and peace. In the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Thus, the importance of water for human survival, socio-economic development, and environmental sustainability cannot be overemphasized. Nevertheless, over 2 billion people worldwide lack safe access to drinking water and sanitation services. More than sixty per cent of water resources are shared by two or more countries, most of which is already unsustainably used. Coordinating development and use of transboundary waters are indispensable to face the impacts of climate change including droughts and floods and the risks of competitions, tensions and conflicts, both within and between States.

The policy briefing will highlight the crucial linkages between water management, effective and equitable cooperation, and peacebuilding. The main objective is to exchange on the existing practices underlining the positive role that equitable and sustainable water management and cooperation can have for peace. Equitable and sustainable cooperative water management, when understood as aligning with the principles of international water law, has broader social, economic, and political benefits, including regional economic and diplomatic integration and the maintenance of peace and security. Based on the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (HRWS) on the topic of “Water and Peace” the event will address the relevance of the human rights to drinking water and sanitation (HRWS) as a tool for peace, conflict prevention and cooperation.

The objectives of this policy briefing encompass various dimensions of peacebuilding, such as preventing disputes arising from competition and inequality, enhancing conflict sensitivity, and resolving or transforming existing conflicts. It directly addresses the need to build trust among stakeholders involved in decision-making processes on water resources by highlighting the positive impacts of transboundary water cooperation for peacebuilding.

Opening remarks

- His Excellency Ambassador Yackoley Kokou Johnson, Permanent Mission of the Togolese Republic to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

Moderator

- Mr Yves Lador, Representative of Earthjustice to the United Nations in Geneva, Earthjustice.

Speakers

- Mr Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, Professor and UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures.
- Ms. Francesca Bernardini, Chief, Transboundary Cooperation Section, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
- Mr Mark Zeitoun, Professor and General Director, Geneva Water Hub.
- Ms Dina Ionesco, Senior Advisor on migration to the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) and Vulnerable 20 Group (V20); Co-Director Master in Migration, Climate Change and Environment, Webster University Geneva.

Concluding remarks

- His Excellency Ambassador Achsanul Habib, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and other international organizations in Geneva.