

Joint Statement by the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts

Arria Formula Meeting on “Freshwater resources and related infrastructure under attack: Protecting Water in Armed Conflict – Protecting Civilian Lives”

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Excellencies,

It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts, a group of states and institutions committed the protection of water resources by preventing and reducing their misuse and damage during armed conflict, in order to protect civilians and the environment.

We would like to thank Slovenia for convening today's Arria Formula Meeting on “Freshwater resources and related infrastructure under attack: Protecting Water in Armed Conflict – Protecting Civilian Lives.”

The past year was another grim year for the protection of civilians breaking yet another record in number of active armed conflicts and impacted civilians. Destruction, disruption, and denial – sometimes deliberate – of water and sanitation services, as well as the pollution of freshwater sources, have become a regular occurrence. These acts are depriving millions of civilians of water – a basic means of survival, health, dignity, and livelihoods.

We express our serious concern about the impacts of armed conflict – including ensuing violations of international law – on the provision of water, namely on freshwater resources and related infrastructure, particularly in urban areas. Dehydration, food insecurity and malnutrition, waterborne diseases, displacement, deprivation of healthcare and education – all have long-lasting and well-documented humanitarian consequences. Particularly on children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, beyond immediate humanitarian concerns, the lack of protection and deliberate destruction or degradation of water and sanitation systems and related infrastructure constitute violations of international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights, including the right to life, and jeopardizes prospects for sustainable development and peace.

Today's meeting offers an opportunity for reflection on concrete actions, tools and mechanisms that the international community shall utilize to better protect civilian lives.

The Global Alliance for Sparing Water from Armed Conflict, launched during last year's Protection of Civilians Week in New York, was created as a tool for advocacy, knowledge sharing and partnerships to galvanize international efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict.

The Alliance advocates for better protection of water before, during, and after armed conflict, ensuring its safeguarding through the effective enforcement, of international humanitarian law, the human right to water and sanitation, and the core principles of humanitarian action.

Let me share some of the tools that the Alliance has been using or is planning to use in its work:

Firstly, generating and promoting knowledge on the direct and indirect effects and long-term consequences of armed conflict on water systems and their impact on the civilian population, especially children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Secondly, raising awareness, leveraging political support and strengthening capacities to reinforce the protection offered by international law, including through calls for the respect of International Humanitarian Law, and the dissemination of the Geneva Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure, the International Law Commission's principles on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts, the ICRC Guidelines on the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict, and other relevant policy instruments to better protect water and civilians.

And thirdly, fostering partnerships to increase preparedness and resilience, to amplify our impact and foster collective and global action to protect civilians and preserve essential services.

Protection of civilians requires strong commitment and sustained collaboration among diverse partners and actors from the peace, development, and humanitarian communities, which is essential for enhanced resilience of water infrastructure in contexts of continued, recurrent, or emerging armed conflict.

With the ultimate goal to ensure the protection of the lives of civilians, as well as their dignity, even during war, we continue to call upon all states and parties to conflicts to fully respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, in all circumstances; and to build a global culture of compliance; and call upon the UN Security Council:

- to further build on its past achievements related to the protection of humanitarian access and of civilian infrastructure, and to aim for implementation of resolutions **2365 (2017), 2417 (2018), 2573 (2021), 2664 (2022), 2761 (2024) and 2730 (2024)**;
- to systematically incorporate the protection of water into the consideration of the items on its agenda;
- And to work with the UN system and the humanitarian actors to address the immediate and long-term and cumulative impact of attacks on freshwater resources and related infrastructure providing essential services to the population.

The Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts stands ready to support the Council in its efforts. Thank you.