

Thematic Report to the 78th session of the UN General Assembly “The rights to water and sanitation as a tool for peace, prevention and cooperation”

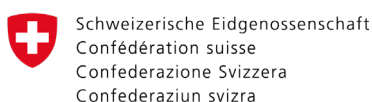
Contribution from the Geneva Water Hub supporting the Special
Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and
sanitation

The Geneva Water Hub is a centre of excellence specialised in hydropolitics and hydrodiplomacy. Its objective is to better understand and contribute to the prevention of tensions related to water by taking into account conflicts of uses between public sectors and private sectors, between political entities, and between states. The Geneva Water Hub is the Secretariat of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace and engages in the promotion and the implementation of the Panel’s recommendations published in September 2017.

The Geneva Water Hub aims at developing the hydropolitics agenda to help prevent water-related conflicts at an early stage at intersectoral and transboundary levels, and to promote water as an instrument of peace and cooperation with the support of the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the University of Geneva.

For more information, kindly contact the Geneva Water Hub – Secretariat of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace at the following e-mail address: contact@genevawaterhub.org and visit our website at www.genevawaterhub.org

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The Human Right to Water and Sanitation (HRWS) can play a crucial role for peace, by guiding equitable transboundary water arrangements and by opening up space for dialogue during and after armed conflict.

1. The scope of water for peace

Water for peace could be understood as promoting equitable distribution of good quality water through robust legal, institutional and policy frameworks prioritising human dignity, fairness, inclusivity and greater social cohesion, along with sustainable use and effective management. Competition for access and allocation of water resources is growing steadily. The competition often sparks disputes and, at times, escalates into violent conflicts. According to some estimates, there will be conflicts over water in some 300 areas across the world by 2025.¹ In situations of armed conflicts, damage to water systems often hamper access to drinking water and sanitation services.² It is essential to remind parties to armed conflicts the importance of protecting water systems and encourage them to consider water issues in ceasefire and peace agreements. Moreover, ensuring access to water and sanitation positively contributes to peace and cooperation in post-conflict situations.³ Providing access to water through the rehabilitation and reconstruction of water systems symbolises a “return to normalcy” and fosters an environment conducive to peace. In line with this, the UN Security Council “encourages” states “to consider the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding” during the Universal Periodic Review process of the Human Rights Council.⁴

Ensuring equitable access to water and sustainable management prevents disputes and violence and facilitates conflict transformation.⁵ It further fosters cooperation, builds trust, strengthens social cohesion, addresses underlying causes of conflict (*including those unrelated to water*), and promotes peace.⁶ Therefore, the scope of the report on water for peace needs to address the preventive, conflict resolution/transformation, and post-conflict peacebuilding roles of water.

The Geneva Water Hub recommends that the scope of the report covers the preventive, conflict resolution/transformation, and post-conflict peacebuilding roles of water.

2. Transboundary water arrangements and cooperation as a tool for conflict prevention

In the context of shared water resources, infrastructure development, diversions, and contamination can raise concerns among riparian states and potentially become sources of dispute or exacerbate existing conflicts. These activities necessitate effective transboundary watercourses arrangements that foster cooperation and build trust among states sharing transboundary waters. Such arrangements could set standards for integrated water resource management, ensure timely data and information sharing, establish

¹ See EU Parliament, “[Access to water as a human right-the external dimension](#)”, 2021/2187(INI), Preamble AA.

² See Geneva Water Hub, “[The Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure](#)”, Geneva (2019).

³ See Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace (GHLPP), *A Matter of Survival*, (2017), pp.14-16, 28 & 69-71; and Ashok Swain, “Water and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding”, *Hydrological Sciences Journal*, (2016) p.1313.

⁴ UNSC, Resolution S/RES/2282 (2016) para 11.

⁵ Jason Gehrig and Mark Rogers, “Water and Conflict: Incorporating Peacebuilding into Water Development” (Catholic Relief Services 2019), pp.57 and 75.

⁶ See UNICEF, *Water Under Fire Volume 1: Emergencies, Development and Peace in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts*, vol 1 (UNICEF 2019); and UNICEF, “The Contribution of Social Services to Peacebuilding and Resilience: Evolving Theory and Practice” (UNICEF 2015), p.38.

joint water management committees or organisations, strive to balance competing demands, and lay a foundation for implementing collaborative projects by sharing responsibility and benefits.⁷

The Senegal River Basin provides a successful example of transboundary cooperation, where the riparian states established a joint institution for managing water resources, leading to improved water governance and collaboration. The Senegal River Development Organization (OMVS) has the mandate to improve livelihood in the basin and ensure the preservation of the ecosystem. It has taken measures, such as prevention of floods, reforestation, the construction of dams (e.g., Diama Dam, on the Senegal River delta, to prevent intrusion of salt water into the lower valley, and Manantali Dam, in western Mali, for water storage, river flow regulation and power generation), and irrigation systems (changing agriculture approaches). Similarly, Angola, Botswana and Namibia have been cooperating in the utilisation and management of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin (CORB) in the framework of the Permanent Okavango Basin River Commission (OKACOM), which has been instrumental in improving people's livelihoods, enhancing regional economic integration and peace and security.⁸ In addition, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) has been managing the Lake Chad waters since the 1960s, fostering cooperation at the regional level, and assisting the basin states in resolving water disputes. It assumed an evolving role in promoting socio-economic development and maintaining peace and security in the region.⁹ The UNSC also acknowledges the LCBC's role in ensuring peace and security in the region.¹⁰ Furthermore, the 2021 resolution adopted by the Parliament of the European Union recognises "transboundary water cooperation as a tool for peace, security and stability" and emphasises the "need for greater complementarity between humanitarian, development and peace actions" to address root causes of conflicts.¹¹ It refers to the two global water conventions "as important tools to support water diplomacy, peace and conflict prevention through transboundary water cooperation."¹² Hence, transboundary water arrangements reduce the risks of water-related conflicts and contribute to resolving or, at least, mitigating broader conflicts, paving the way for a more peaceful and interdependent world.

A. The HRWS in transboundary water arrangements

The HRWS has considerable potential to improve transboundary water arrangements. The primary focus of existing arrangements is water allocation,¹³ management and cooperation among riparian states. The UN Watercourses Convention indicates that in cases of conflict over different water uses, special regard needs to be "given to the requirements of vital human needs".¹⁴ As it stands, there is a scant mention of the HRWS in such arrangements. There are a few transboundary water agreements that feature the HRWS. For example, the Water Charter for the Lake Chad Basin stipulates that the right to water is one of the factors to be taken into account in implementing the obligation of equitable and sustainable use of the basin.¹⁵ It requires member states to recognise HRWS as a fundamental right and necessary for human dignity (Article 72). It

⁷ See e.g., United Nations and UNESCO, *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and acceleration needs*, 2021, pp.1-4.

⁸ See OKACOM, "[Realising the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin](#)", Policy Summary (June 2020).

⁹ LCBC, "Promoting Regional Integration, Peace and Security", available at: <https://cblt.org/promoting-regionalintegration-peace-and-security>. See also Water Charter of the Lake Chad Basin 2012, Articles 3 and 7 (i).

¹⁰ See UNSC Resolution, S/RES/2349 (2017), para. 25.

¹¹ EU Parliament, (n 1), para. 32.

¹² *Ibid*, para. 10.

¹³ See UNECE, "Handbook on water allocation in a transboundary context", (Geneva 2021), pp.102-109.

¹⁴ See e.g., UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (May 1997) (UN Watercourses Convention), Article 10. The phrase "vital human needs" refers to "sufficient water to sustain life, including drinking water, water for hygiene and sanitation, and water for food production in order to prevent starvation". See Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, Report of the Sixth Committee Convening as the Working Group of the Whole, UN Doc. A/51/869, 11 April 1997, p. 5.

¹⁵ Water Charter of the Lake Chad Basin 2012, Article 13 (o).

further adds that states parties to the Charter take the normative, institutional and operational measures required to implement the rights effectively.

Other transboundary agreements only mention “*the right to water*”. For instance, the Niger Basin Charter affirms the “right of each individual for access to water” as one of the guiding principles for the cooperation between riparian states in managing the shared resources (Preamble). It defines the “right to water” as the fundamental right to sufficient physically accessible water at affordable cost and of a quality that is acceptable for personal and domestic use.¹⁶ Similarly, the Water Charter of Senegal River recognises the enjoyment of the right to water as an explicit objective of any repartition of the water of the river. It sets out various guiding principles with the objectives to guarantee “to the populations of the riparian States the full enjoyment of the resource ... as well as the basic human right to clean water”.¹⁷ The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (AfCHPR) encourages African states to “explicitly recognise the right to water in transboundary water agreements” and considers the right to water as one of the factors in determining equitable and reasonable use.¹⁸ The agreement on the Dniester River between Ukraine and Moldova also recognises the right to water as a key principle of cooperation.¹⁹ The 1999 Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Uses of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes enunciates that member states should set standards and pursue a target of ensuring access to water and sanitation services for everyone.²⁰ By explicitly recognising the right to water, these agreements ensure a wider scope of the right beyond the “vital human needs” included under international water law. The inclusion of the right to water guarantees the provision of water necessary to live a life with dignity.

B. The extraterritorial applicability of HRWS

Initially, “questions of international watercourse law and all transboundary water” were left out of the discussion of HRWS.²¹ Subsequent Human Rights Council’s resolutions, however, do not include such an explicit exclusion. Correspondingly, transboundary arrangements have already started addressing HRWS. This is relevant due to the potential transboundary impacts on the quantity and quality of water. Actions within one co-riparian state can directly or indirectly impact individuals in another country, potentially affecting their human rights, such as the right to an adequate standard of living or cultural rights.²² The question is, therefore, whether a state is bound not only by the obligation to ensure access to safe drinking water supplies to individuals and communities living in its territory and under its jurisdiction but also to take into account the right to water of the communities living in other riparian states. In fact, the UN Watercourses Convention recognised the interests of persons “who have suffered or are under a serious threat of suffering significant transboundary harm as a result of activities related to an international watercourse” and recognised the right to “have access to judicial or other procedures, or a right to claim compensation or other relief in respect of significant harm.”²³

From the perspective of human rights, Article 2(1) of the ICESCR states that each State party “undertakes to take steps, individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources” and Articles 11 (2), 22 and 23 also require international

¹⁶ The Niger Basin Water Charter, 2008, Article 1 (11).

¹⁷ Water Charter of the Senegal River 2002, Article 4.

¹⁸ See AfCHPR, [Guidelines on the Right to Water in Africa](#), (2020), para 35.

¹⁹ Treaty on Cooperation in the Field of Protection and Sustainable Development of the Dniester River Basin 2012, Article 5(2).

²⁰ See Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes 1999, Article 6.

²¹ UN Human Rights Council (HRC), Resolution 7/22 (28 March 2008).

²² Anna FS Russell and Stephen McCaffrey, “Tapping Transboundary Waters: Implications of the Right to Water for States Sharing International Watercourses” in *The Human Right to Water: Theory, Practice and Prospects*, Malcolm Langford and Anna FS Russell (eds), (2017), p.150.

²³ UN Watercourses Convention (n 14), Article 32.

actions and cooperation.²⁴ Also, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights under General Comment No. 15 emphasises that state parties should respect the enjoyment of the right to water in other countries and refrain from actions that interfere with it (the document does not differentiate between waters that cross state boundaries and those that do not). It notes that “any activities undertaken within the State party”’s jurisdiction should not deprive another country of the ability to realise the right to water for persons in its jurisdiction” and that “State parties should refrain at all times from imposing embargoes or similar measures, that prevent the supply of water, ... for securing the right to water”.²⁵ The International Court of Justice and regional human rights bodies have recognized extraterritorial human rights obligations under certain conditions.²⁶ The recognition of the extraterritorial applicability of HRWS has significant implications for states sharing a transboundary water resource in relation to the water demands of their population.²⁷

C. The advantages of incorporating the HRWS in transboundary water arrangements

Explicitly incorporating the HRWS in transboundary water arrangements has a number of advantages.

1. It furnishes a legal basis for addressing the needs and rights of persons dependent on shared water resources and obliges basin states to respect, protect and fulfil the HRWS.²⁸
2. It establishes legal standards in the relationship between riparian states in relation to the HRWS that could inform the equitable and sustainable use of shared resources.
3. It enhances public participation and empowers vulnerable and marginalised groups to combat exclusion and discrimination. This participatory right provides a clear normative framework, particularly in post-conflict states, to prioritise the population”s needs and representation of women, children, and indigenous people.²⁹ This helps to significantly reduce tensions among community members regarding access to water, promote dialogue, and strengthen community peacebuilding.³⁰
4. It emphasises the need for sustainable water management practices and requires integrating principles of equity, efficiency, and environmental sustainability.³¹ Adopting a rights-based approach to defining, implementing, and ultimately enforcing the rights ensures equitable short-term results and sustainable longer-term development goals.³²
5. It also enhances the possibility of implementation and enforcement of the HRWS.³³ The importance of ensuring accountability mechanisms for properly implementing such rights is addressed under

²⁴ See *International solidarity and the extraterritorial application of human rights: prospects and challenges*, Report of the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity, Obiora Chinedu Okafor, A/HRC/50/37, 19 April 2022, paras 19-22; see also paras 6-9 and 19-21.

²⁵ See UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General comment No.15: The right to water (Arts. 11 and 12 of the Covenant) 2003 (General Comment No.15), paras 31 and 32.

²⁶ See e.g., *Case concerning Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo* (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda) 19 December 2005, para 216; African Commission on Human and Peoples” Rights, *Mohammed Abdullah Saleh Al-Asad v. The Republic of Djibouti*, Communication 383/10, paras 132-136; and Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Advisory Opinion Oc-23/17 of 15 November 2017, Requested by the Republic of Colombia, *The Environment And Human Rights*, paras. 95 and 102.

²⁷ See Christina Leb, “The Right to Water in a Transboundary Context: Emergence of Seminal Trends” 37 *Water International* 640 (2012); and Russell and McCaffrey, (n 22).

²⁸ General comment No.15 (n 25), paras 20-29.

²⁹ See UNGA/UNSC, “Challenge of Sustaining Peace, Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture” (2015) A/69/968-S/2015/490, para 7 (j).

³⁰ See UNICEF, *Water Under Fire Volume 1* (n 6), pp.6&23; and Daniëlla Dam-de Jong, “Building a Sustainable Peace: How Peace Processes Shape and Are Shaped by the International Legal Framework for the Governance of Natural Resources”, 29 *Review of European, Comparative & International Environmental Law* 21, (2020).

³¹ See United Nations and UNESCO (n 7).

³² UNGA, “Report of the Independent Expert on the Issue of Human Rights Obligations Related to Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque” UN Doc. A/65/254 (2010), para 10.

³³ See General comment No.15 (n 25), paras 55-59.

the AfCHPR Guidelines on the human right to water in Africa, affirming that accountability has a broader aspect, including the accountability of nonstate actors, corporations, and individuals.³⁴

6. Incorporating HRWS in transboundary arrangements strengthens cooperation and development assistance for the full realisation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.³⁵ Generally, upholding the HRWS can build a foundation for peace, stability, and cooperation at the local, national, and international levels.

The Geneva Water Hub recommends that the report calls upon states to incorporate the HRWS into their transboundary water arrangements and emphasizes the commendable practices of River Basin Organizations that have already integrated the HRWS. The report should also describe the benefits of the HRWS in a transboundary context.

3. The role of the right to water in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations

The importance of protecting water systems in armed conflicts cannot be overemphasised. Access to water and sanitation is also intricately intertwined with other human rights, such as the right to life, health and food, and becomes necessary to support livelihoods and facilitate post-conflict recovery and development. The following parts explain the role of water for peace during armed conflict and post-conflict situations.

A. Cooperation on water in relation to armed conflicts

Armed conflicts adversely affect water resources and infrastructure, negatively impacting short-term and longer-term efforts in post-conflict states. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights posits that states are under obligation to respect the human right to water and sanitation during armed conflicts.³⁶ If the global aspiration to leave no one behind is to be achieved, the lack of access to water and sanitation services of the significant number of people living in fragile and conflict-affected areas must be addressed. History has taught us that parties to armed conflicts recognise the importance of water as a common resource and cooperate in accessing and managing water resources. Such cooperation has positive spin-offs for peace – including triggering dialogue, building trust and working towards mutually beneficial solutions and creating a conducive environment for conflict resolution. There are examples of continued cooperation on water issues amidst armed conflicts - evidencing that conflict and cooperation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, the Permanent Indus Commission, established under the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan, has remained active during active conflicts and ongoing tensions between the two countries, demonstrating the potential of transboundary water cooperation to foster peace. Likewise, the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS) continued its work during the conflict between Mauritania and Senegal and had a role in reinitiating the diplomatic ties between the two countries. Similarly, the Mekong Committee did not discontinue its activities during the Vietnam conflict, which later led to regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. The Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace (GHLPP) has recommended the inclusion of water issues and water cooperation in peace agreements.³⁷ Similarly, the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure provides that “peace agreements must not deprive peoples of their rights to water and sanitation. Peace agreements should be concluded in accordance with the principle of equitable and reasonable utilisation of water resources.”³⁸ There have been efforts to include water issues in ceasefire negotiations and peace agreements. For instance, in the peace

³⁴ See AfCHPR (n 18), para 10. See also, para 7.1.

³⁵ See International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), Articles 2 (1) and 23; and General Comment no.15 (n 25).

³⁶ General comment No.15 (n 25), paras 21-22.

³⁷ GHLPP, (n 3), p.31.

³⁸ See Geneva List of Principles, (n 2), Principle 19.

agreement between Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the parties agreed to work towards ensuring “sustainable development: that is to say, a development that is environmentally and socially sustainable, requiring protection and promotion of access to water, as part of an ordered concept of territory” and acknowledged the need “to guarantee access to drinking water and the management of wastewater.”³⁹ The government further commits to “set up and implement the National Irrigation and Drainage Plan (Plan Nacional de Riego y Drenaje) for the rural, family-run and community-based economies.”⁴⁰ In Darfur, the peace agreement with rebels indicates that the “government of Sudan shall, in accordance with relevant provisions of the (Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), promote the general welfare and economic growth in Darfur through the provision of basic services and infrastructure including water.”⁴¹ In 2015, the Participants in the Libyan Political Dialogue agreed that “armed formations shall withdraw from all vital and infrastructure installations, including vital water installations” and that the Government “shall take the necessary action for the formation and deployment of units of the army and police to protect vital and infrastructure installations.”⁴² In the recent armed conflict in Sudan,⁴³ the parties to the conflict “commit to vacate and refrain from occupying, as well as to respect and protect ... water and electricity installations, and refrain from using them for military purposes” and “to achieve a short-term ceasefire to facilitate the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance and restoration of essential services.”⁴⁴

The overwhelming majority of contemporary armed conflicts are non-international in nature, i.e., they involve armed non-state actors (ANSAs). ANSAs in Syria, Libya and Yemen use control over water resources or water infrastructure as a weapon or to exploit people’s vulnerability in fragile contexts.⁴⁵ Some ANSAs adopted codes of conduct relevant to the protection of water infrastructure and water-related infrastructure⁴⁶ and undertook to ensure that civilians within its areas of control are safe and have access to basic services.⁴⁷ In 2020, it was estimated that “between 50 to 60 million individuals live under the full control of armed groups worldwide while approximately 100 million live in areas where this control is contested”.⁴⁸ ANSAs have human rights obligations, including the rights to water and sanitation – the extent of the obligation is ANSA specific and graduated, determined based on the nature of ANSA’s control, capacity, and governance.⁴⁹ Thus, ANSAs must respect, protect and fulfil the rights to water and sanitation of the people under areas they control or administer. As mentioned above, in some cases, peace agreements between parties to non-international armed conflicts also address the protection of water systems and the

³⁹ Colombia and FARC, Final Agreement to end the Armed Conflict and build a stable and lasting peace, 2016, pp.14&27.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.25.

⁴¹ Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Justice and Equality Movement - Sudan on the Basis of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, 6 April 2013, Article 2 (4).

⁴² Libyan Political Agreement, signed on 17 December 2015, Article 40.

⁴³ “Since April 2023, the government of Sudan has been engaging in a NIAC against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)” see Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, [Non-international armed conflicts in Sudan](#), (RULAC), 2023.

⁴⁴ See “[Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan](#)”, (11 May 2023).

⁴⁵ See e.g., HRC, Human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations in the Syrian Arab Republic, 21 July 2016-28 February 2017, A/HRC/34/CRP.3, 10 March 2017, para 32; and “UN condemns water cut off to Libyan capital Tripoli”, *Al Jazeera*, 1 April 2020.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, NTC/FLA, To the members of the Libyan Liberation Army: Code of rules and attitudes of the organisation for the successful conduct of fighting,” Article 2 (2) (d); and National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) (ELN), “Code of war”.

⁴⁷ Free Syrian Army, “Unilateral Declaration,” 2016.

⁴⁸ Irene Herbet and Jerome Drevon, “Engaging armed groups at the International Committee of the Red Cross: Challenges, opportunities and COVID-19”, 102 *International Review of the Red Cross* 915, (2020), p.1026.

⁴⁹ See HRC, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions on Armed Non- State Actors: The Protection of the Right to Life, (Agnes Callamard)” (2018) A/HRC/38/44, paras 8, 52 & 75.

promotion of access to water. Engaging ANSAs to protect water and related efforts to enhance peace is imperative.⁵⁰

At the transboundary level, water cooperation could also serve as a platform for tackling broader social, economic and political issues. For instance, the LCBC has the mandate to ensure the sustainable and equitable use of the resources of the Lake and to promote regional integration, peace and security throughout the basin.⁵¹ In a distinctive role for basin commissions, the Council of Ministers of LCBC adopted the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery, and Resilience (RSS) on 30 August 2018 to address the underlying causes of the Boko Haram insurgency and bring an end to the conflict in the region.⁵² This depicts that River Basin Organisations can actively promote peace and may act as a bridge between the development and humanitarian response interventions in fragile and conflict affected regions.

B. Water in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts

Lack of access to water and sanitation are among the plethora of problems facing conflict affected societies. Addressing these issues symbolises a “return to normalcy”, and integrating water use and management issues in peacebuilding endeavours can enhance stability, foster economic development, and reduce the likelihood of relapse of conflicts. For example, after the conflict in Rwanda, the government prioritised the rehabilitation of water supply systems, resulting in improved access to safe water and sanitation, contributing to public health and promoting reconciliation among affected communities.⁵³ In 2002, the International Sava River Commission, established under the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, was the first joint mechanism created after the war in the Former Yugoslavia and demonstrates the power of cooperation over water to drive and consolidate peacebuilding efforts.⁵⁴ Moreover, the UN Peacebuilding Commission, mandated by the UNSC to develop integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery focusing on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts to lay the foundation for sustainable development,⁵⁵ has been instrumental in using water for peace efforts in different countries, including Yemen, Burkina Faso, Sudan and Somalia.⁵⁶ It has been using water as an entry point in fragile and conflict-affected areas, strengthening the role of women in local water management and dispute resolution, and alleviating local conflicts and sources of vulnerability.⁵⁷

Since the late 1990s, the UNSC has given increased consideration to managing and protecting natural resources while dealing with peace and security issues, including in its post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. In this regard, the UN Peace Operations play a critical role in addressing resource-related conflicts, including ensuring access to water and sanitation in their deployment areas.⁵⁸ A notable example is the United Nations Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has significantly contributed by providing water tanks and standpipes and undertaking the rehabilitation of infrastructure, such as bridges, which has facilitated trade, enhanced livelihood activities, and improved access to essential services. Similarly, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

⁵⁰ See Geneva List of Principles, (n 2), pp.9-11 and 81-84; and Geneva Water Hub, “A Study of National Legal Frameworks related to the Protection of Water During Armed Conflicts: A Follow-Up Study to the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure”. (2023), p.89.

⁵¹ See [Lake Chad Basin Commission](#) (LCBC).

⁵² See LCBC, [Regional Strategy for the Stabilization](#).

⁵³ UNDP, “[Rwanda post-conflict environmental assessment](#)”, (2010).

⁵⁴ [The Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin](#) (2002).

⁵⁵ UNSC Resolution 1645 (2005), para.2; UNSC Resolution 2282 (2016), para.4.

⁵⁶ See Erica Gaston et al., “[climate-Security and Peacebuilding: Thematic Review](#)”, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (April 2023).

⁵⁷ See e.g., *Ibid*, pp.33-38.

⁵⁸ See UNEP, “Greening the Blue Helmets: Natural Resources and UN Peacekeeping Operations”, (Report 2012), p.42; Geneva List of Principles, (n 2), pp.91-93; and A Study of National Legal Frameworks (n 50), pp. 92-93.

and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) have been active in increasing water accessibility in their respective area of operations through the construction of water boreholes and water towers and have extended their support to prevent tension between herders and farmers and create an environment of peaceful coexistence.⁵⁹ In addition to taking measures “to prevent, mitigate and remediate the harm to the environment resulting from those operation”,⁶⁰ where appropriate, the mandates of peace operations should include the protection, reconstruction and rehabilitation of water systems.⁶¹

The Geneva Water Hub recommends that the report underscores the significance of water as a fundamental component of conflict resolution and peacebuilding endeavours. This includes highlighting the benefits of cooperation over water, even during armed conflict, such as ensuring regional economic integration and maintaining peace and security. In relation to non international armed conflicts, the report could also specify the need to engage ANSAs to address water-related issues, including during ceasefire negotiations and peace agreements. Additionally, it is vital to highlight the role of UN Peace Operations in ensuring access to water and sanitation, thereby contributing to broader peacebuilding efforts.

⁵⁹ “Four Ways Conflict affects Water Resources and How UN Peacekeeping Helps” 22 Mar 2023, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/four-ways-conflict-affects-water-resources-and-how-un-peacekeeping-helps>.

⁶⁰ International Law Commission, “Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts, with Commentaries”, UN Doc. A/77/10, (2022), Principle 7.

⁶¹ See Geneva List of Principles, (n 2), Principle 22.