



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
9 October 2012

Original: English

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## Human Rights Council

### Twenty-first session

Agenda item 3

### Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

#### Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council\*

#### 21/2.

#### The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation

*The Human Rights Council,*

*Reaffirming* all previous relevant resolutions of the Human Rights Council, inter alia, resolutions 7/22 of 28 March 2008, 12/8 of 1 October 2009, 15/9 of 30 September 2010, 16/2 of 24 March 2011 and 18/1 of 28 September 2011,

*Recalling* General Assembly resolution 64/292 of 28 July 2010, in which the Assembly recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights,

*Recalling also* the holding of the General Assembly plenary meeting of 27 July 2011 entitled “The human right to water and sanitation”,

*Recalling further* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,

*Recalling* Human Rights Council resolution 19/5 of 22 March 2012 on the question of the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights,

*Recalling also* the relevant provisions of declarations and programmes with regard to access to safe drinking water and sanitation adopted by major United Nations conferences and summits, and by the General Assembly at its special sessions and during follow-up meetings, inter alia, the Mar del Plata Action Plan on Water Development and Administration, adopted at the United Nations Water Conference in March 1977, Agenda

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\* The resolutions and decisions adopted by the Human Rights Council will be contained in the report of the Council on its twenty-first session (A/HRC/21/2), chap. I.

21 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992, and the Habitat Agenda, adopted at the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in June 1996, Assembly resolutions 54/175 of 17 December 1999 on the right to development, and 58/217 of 23 December 2003 proclaiming the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life” (2005-2015), 65/153 of 20 December 2010, establishing the follow-up to the International Year of Sanitation, 65/ 154 of 20 December 2010, establishing 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation, and the outcome document entitled “The future we want”, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro on 22 June 2012 and by the Assembly in its resolution 66/288 of 27 July 2012,

*Noting with interest* relevant commitments and initiatives promoting the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, including the Abuja Declaration, adopted at the first Africa-South America Summit, in 2006, the message from Beppu, adopted at the first Asia-Pacific Water Summit, in 2007, the Delhi Declaration, adopted at the third South Asian Conference on Sanitation, in 2008, the Sharm el-Sheikh Final Document, adopted at the Fifteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, in 2009, and the Colombo Declaration, adopted at the fourth South Asian Conference on Sanitation, in 2011,

*Bearing in mind* the commitments made by the international community to achieve fully the Millennium Development Goals, and stressing in that context the resolve of Heads of State and Government, as expressed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water, and to halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation, as agreed in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (“Johannesburg Plan of Implementation”) and the outcome document adopted at the High-level Plenary Meeting of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals entitled “Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals”,

*Recalling* World Health Assembly resolution 64/24 of May 2011, in which the Assembly urged Member States to, inter alia, “ensure that national health strategies contribute to the realization of water- and sanitation-related Millennium Development Goals while coming in support to the progressive realization of the human right to water and sanitation that entitles everyone, without discrimination, to water and sanitation that is sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable for personal and domestic uses”,

*Recalling in particular* paragraph 5 (f) of Human Rights Council resolution 16/2, in which the Council encouraged the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, in fulfilling her mandate, to make recommendations for goals beyond the 2015 Millennium Development Goals process with special regard to the full realization of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, and also to continue to make more recommendations that could help the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular of Goal 7, as appropriate,

*Deeply concerned* that approximately 780 million people still lack access to improved water sources and that more than 2.5 billion people do not have access to improved sanitation as defined by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund in their 2012 Joint Monitoring Programme report, concerned that these figures do not fully capture the water safety aspect and equity, equality and non-discrimination issues as indicated by that report, and therefore underestimate the numbers of those without access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and alarmed that, every year, approximately 1.5 million children under five years of age die and 443 million school days are lost as a result of water- and sanitation-related diseases,

*Affirming* the need to focus on local and national perspectives in considering the issue, leaving aside questions of international watercourse law and all transboundary water issues,

1. *Welcomes* the recognition of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and the reaffirmation by the latter that the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human dignity;

2. *Also welcomes* the commitments of States regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation made at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development on 22 June 2012;

3. *Further welcomes* the fact that, according to the 2012 Joint Monitoring Programme report, the Millennium Development Goal target relating to the reduction by 50 per cent of people without access to an improved water source has been met five years before its deadline of 2015, insists that much remains to be done on safety, equity, equality and non-discrimination issues, and regrets the fact that the Millennium Development Goal target on sanitation is still one of the most off-track of the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015;

4. *Welcomes* the work of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, the comprehensive, transparent and inclusive consultations conducted with relevant and interested actors from all regions for her thematic reports and compilation of good practices, and the undertaking of country missions;

5. *Also welcomes* the second annual report of the Special Rapporteur submitted to the General Assembly on financing for the realization of the right to water and sanitation,<sup>1</sup> and takes notes with appreciation of her recommendations and clarifications with regard to questions of financing the implementation of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation;

6. *Takes note* of the fourth annual report of the Special Rapporteur submitted to the Human Rights Council;<sup>2</sup>

7. *Expresses deep concern* at the negative impact of discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization on the full enjoyment of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation;

8. *Reaffirms* that States have the primary responsibility to ensure the full realization of all human rights and must take steps, nationally and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of their available resources, to achieve progressively the full realization of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation by all appropriate means, including in particular the adoption of legislative measures in the implementation of their human rights obligations;

9. *Takes note* of the finding made by the Special Rapporteur that ensuring safe drinking water and sanitation for all will require considerably more resources;

10. *Also takes note* of the finding made by the Special Rapporteur that better targeted use of existing resources to prioritize the most excluded and marginalized, as well

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<sup>1</sup> A/66/255.

<sup>2</sup> A/HRC/21/42.

as more transparent budgets and better coordination, will help to realize fully the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation;

11. *Calls upon* States:

(a) To prioritize in an appropriate way funding for safe drinking water and sanitation, with a particular focus on extending access to the unserved or underserved, including measures to identify the most marginalized, excluded and disadvantaged persons in terms of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, to develop the capacity of decision makers and practitioners for implementing strategies and concepts specifically focusing on the sustainable provision of safe drinking water and sanitation to the unserved poor, and to develop specific initiatives that are more likely to reach the most marginalized and disadvantaged and improve their situation;

(b) To consider increasing the percentage of international aid allocated to safe drinking water and sanitation, and to incorporate a human rights-based approach;

(c) To monitor the affordability of safe drinking water and sanitation in order to determine whether specific measures are needed to ensure that household contributions are and remain affordable by means of, inter alia, effective regulation and oversight of all service providers;

(d) To promote transparency of budgets and other funding, as well as of programmes and projects of all actors in the water and sanitation sector, in order to ensure an adequate basis for planning with regard to the most vulnerable and marginalized sectors of society and in order to inform decision-making and policymaking processes in both public and private sectors;

(e) To consult with communities on adequate solutions to ensure sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation;

(f) To ensure the sustainability of access to water and sanitation by, inter alia, capacity-building of Government authorities at all levels with regard to their responsibilities in the service delivery chain, adequate budgeting of costs, including costs of maintenance, and establishing an adequate and effective regulatory system;

12. *Invites* States to continue to promote, at all levels, including at the highest level, the full realization of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation in forthcoming national, regional and international initiatives;

13. *Stresses* the important role of the international cooperation and technical assistance provided by States, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and international and development partners, as well as by donor agencies, in particular in the timely achievement of the relevant Millennium Development Goals, and urges development partners to adopt a human rights-based approach when designing and implementing development programmes in support of national initiatives and plans of action related to the right to safe drinking water and sanitation;

14. *Encourages* the Special Rapporteur to continue to make contributions to the discussions on the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, in particular on the integration of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and, in this regard, calls upon States to build the post-2015 framework on the values outlined in the Millennium Declaration around the fundamental principles of respect for human rights, equality and sustainability, and to integrate the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation into the international development agenda beyond 2015;

15. *Encourages* all Governments to continue to respond favourably to requests by the Special Rapporteur for visits and information, to follow up effectively on the

recommendations of the mandate holder and to make available information on measures taken in this regard;

16. *Requests* the Special Rapporteur to continue to report, on an annual basis, to the Human Rights Council and to submit an annual report to the General Assembly;

17. *Encourages* the Special Rapporteur to facilitate, including through engagement with relevant stakeholders, the provision of technical assistance in the area of the implementation of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation;

18. *Requests* the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide the Special Rapporteur with all the resources and assistance necessary for the effective fulfilment of her mandate;

19. *Decides to continue* its consideration of this matter under the same agenda item and in accordance with its programme of work.

*36th meeting  
27 September 2012*

[Adopted without a vote.]

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