

OHCHR's inputs on game changers and themes for the 2023 Water Conference

OHCHR welcomes the statements of many member states regarding the need to ensure the comprehensive integration of the human rights to water and sanitation, and the Human Rights-based approach to water governance, in the 2023 Water Conference. In this regard, while the perspective of the rights to water and sanitation can be well placed under theme 1, the human rights-based approach to water governance and some other aspects of the human rights to water and sanitation, including international cooperation for their realization, can also be transversally integrated in the four other themes.

Regarding game changers, under SDG 6.1, member states have committed to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all, in line with the content of the human right to water. This means prioritizing the personal and domestic use of water for human beings, particularly for those left behind – vis-à-vis industrial, commercial or recreational uses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown that lack of access to water and sanitation has increased the likelihood of morbidity and mortality, and that the exacerbated social and economic inequalities generated by the pandemic have created more obstacles to access safe drinking water and sanitation for those left behind.

In order to prioritize this use of the scarce resource that water is, it is necessary to ensure that water governance structures include the voice and interests of those left behind, to offset the voice and interests of more powerful and influential actors, and prevent the risk of corporate capture.

In OHCHR's opinion, the basic game changer would be taking the HRBA to water governance seriously. This means that the guiding principles for the design of water governance mechanisms should be substantive equality and non-discrimination (to honour the imperatives of "no one left behind, and reaching the furthest behind first), participation and inclusion of those left behind in water governance and management, transparency (including data production and access to information), and accountability.

The Secretary-General's "Call to Action for human rights" appeals to all countries to put human rights principles and mechanisms front and centre in implementation of the SDGs. We believe that this Call to Action could be a game changer for the acceleration of the SDG 6 and the implementation of the Water Action Decade.

Following the Call to Action and Our Common Agenda, UN-Water has developed a Roadmap for the integration of human rights in water and sanitation which identifies priority actions around the four action pillars of the UN-Water SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework: engage, align, accelerate and account.

One of the priorities is to strengthen synergy with the work of the UN human rights mechanisms, which provide an accountability framework at international level as well as a wealth of guidance, information and data to leave no one behind.

OHCHR stands ready to support your efforts in ensuring the integration of human rights in all relevant discussions and outcomes of the Water Conference, in order to achieve SDG 6 and make the human rights to water and sanitation a reality for all.

Thank you.