



UN  
2023 WATER  
CONFERENCE

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## UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

### Sparing Water Systems in Armed Conflict

Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 11:00-12:15, UNHQ (room 6)

Member States: Togo, Slovenia, Finland, Switzerland

Organizations: Geneva Water Hub, ICRC, UNICEF

#### Background on the event

Sparing water systems during armed conflicts is indispensable for the protection of over 180 million persons who currently suffer the consequences of war-damaged water systems. If the international community is to leave no one behind, states and other actors must commit to strengthening understanding and implementation of existing legal and policy frameworks to better spare water systems in conflict settings. The side event on '*Sparing Water Systems in Armed Conflict*' aims to shed light on the increasing misuse and damage of water systems during armed conflicts and the ensuing devastating consequences on access to safe drinking water and sanitation and reverberating impacts on healthcare and education, and to promote respect and ensure better implementation of norms of international law protecting water systems during armed conflicts. It brought together delegates of states and stakeholders from development, peacebuilding and humanitarian sectors dealing with the operational, legal and policy responses to share their insights and experience on finding innovative ways to ensure a better protection of water systems.

#### Water Action Agenda (one paragraph, if possible, please include the link to your commitment in the [Water Action Agenda database](#))

The Geneva Water Hub aims to mainstream water for peace in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts. The GWH works towards the widespread recognition of water's potential for peaceful purposes, greater use of science in water-related decision-making and a better understanding of international laws related to the protection, sustainable use and management of water. Please find here the 'commitment' of the GWH.

## **Key Issues discussed**

- Increasing misuses and damages of water systems during armed conflicts and their consequences, including reverberating impacts on healthcare and education.
- Protecting water systems as part and parcel of ensuring international peace and security.
- The legal framework on the protection of water systems, including the Geneva Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure and the International Law Commission's Principles on the Protection of the Environment in relation to Armed Conflicts,
- The importance of clarifying the rules of international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights law and their interpretation.
- The pressing need to implement existing laws protecting water systems, training for military personnel and engaging with armed groups.
- The roles of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UN agencies in ensuring compliance with international law, including those on the protection of water systems.
- The need to have comprehensive data, and monitoring and reporting mechanisms on attacks on water systems.
- The deficiencies in enforcing international law during armed conflicts and the potential role of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and regional human rights bodies.

## **Key recommendations for action**

- Strengthening the resilience of water systems.
- Bolstering coordination between peace, development and humanitarian actors.
- Setting up an international coalition of partners to monitor and report attacks on water systems and regularly update the UNSC.
- The UNSC should adopt a resolution on the protection of water systems in the section on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.
- Inserting the protection of water systems in the mandates of the UN peace operations.