



UN
2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Hearing the Unheard, Human Right to Water and Sanitation

23 March, 15:00-16:30, Church Center

Organized by: End Water Poverty with Water Integrity Network, OHCHR, UNSR, ICLEI, UCLG, ESCR-Net, ONGAWA, Simavi, WWI, WU, Coalition Eau; WYN, UYPETDL, FANMex/ Redes del Agua

Background on the event (one paragraph)

This side event was originally conceived as the first step in the implementation of the UN Water Expert Group's Human Rights to Water and Sanitation Roadmap. It's not just an event. It's a digital campaign #HearingtheUnheardHRWS that will have a life beyond this conference. It's also a political statement, and a powerful evidence base. Over the last two months we have gathered testimonies on the lived experience, agency, responses from government and demands of 54 different marginalised groups in 18 countries. Event and digital campaign shared video and live testimony from marginalised groups across the globe, with responses from the Special Rapporteur, OHCHR and national and local government. Member State support from Liberia and South Africa.

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

The Water Action Agenda must foreground rights holders and counter stigma, discrimination and exclusion on any grounds. A paradigm shift is needed to acknowledge groups deemed "unlawful" such as undocumented migrants, homeless people, informal settlement residents, informal vendors and others, as legitimate participants and rights holders, to whom States and private actors acting on behalf of States, are accountable.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- The human rights framework is legally binding on States. It obliges States to provide water, sanitation, and related services to everyone living in their jurisdictions, regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, or nationality. It also requires States to

engage meaningfully with and be accountable to all groups, including marginalised groups, and to allocate maximum available resources to provide adequate housing, a safe environment and dignified, affordable water and sanitation services.

- Human rights violations are a symptom of structural inequality. Access to food, water, electricity, sanitation, and other rights remains divided along racial, class and gender lines, deepening poverty and inequality.
- We're barely at the foothills of SDG attainment. Injustices prevail despite justiciable human rights because it is the poorest and most marginalised who are least able to claim or realise their rights or hold duty bearers accountable.
- Marginalised people are often not able to claim their rights or hold power to account because they are not seen or treated as legitimate participants by public or private actors. They are excluded from formal participation and accountability processes in the countries where they live, and from global decision-making processes and engagements.
- Even where they are engaged, marginalised groups seldom have the resources or capacity to engage in public consultation processes, which are often opaque, technical, and not in their home language.
- Civic space is increasingly repressed, and human rights defenders face criminalisation, victimisation, surveillance, and assassinations when they oppose States or State-sanctioned private actions or actors.
- In repressed contexts, Member States cannot be assumed to speak on behalf of grassroots groups.
- Despite an explicitly inclusive vision, the travel costs, visa requirements, accreditation criteria and protocols of UN Water 2023 exclude grassroots groups.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- Justiciable human rights are only the beginning. Communities play a vital role in strengthening governance by persistently holding States accountable. It is the agency and actions of communities that activate legal and policy frameworks and political promises.
- "Civil society" goes beyond registered NGOs and includes social movements organising access to housing, services and livelihoods, and frontline environmental rights activists. These groups present a profound opportunity for States to co-create housing and services provision if they engage their energy and organising constructively.
- Rather than "leave no one behind", we must put rights-holders in front.