UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event
Event ID: W158

Water Rights are Human Rights: Why We Need a Technical Support?

23rd of March, 14H00 to 15H00,
UNCC, 777 UN Plaza, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10017

Organized by: **Sikh Human Rights Group**, Tufts University, Saving Punjab, Aquaful, Royal Ambassadors Ministries, Inc., Moses West Foundation

Background on the event
Pesticides, fertilisers, landfills and unregulated disposal of hazardous material has resulted in contamination of ground water in many regions of the world, especially in developing countries. Ground water is also the main source of drinking water for human beings and domesticated animals in these lands. The side event will look at different ways to reverse this, control it, prevent it, make drinking water safer with economically affordable technology and also look at possibility of setting up a technical support and financial aid for many developing countries to make water safer for health. We are working on strengthening the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management (Goal 6.b).

Key Issues discussed

- Need for inclusive conversations which include everyone, increased sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature.
- Greater scarcity of water will lead to an increase in the cost of food and the various products which depend on its use. Some studies warn that an acute water shortage may occur within a few decades unless urgent action is taken. The environmental repercussions could affect billions of people; it is also conceivable that the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century. Water stress is a driver of insecurity.
- Exposure to pesticides can cause serious health damages, including leukemia, lymphoma and cancers of the brain, breasts, prostate, testes and ovaries. Reproductive harm from pesticides includes birth defects, still birth, spontaneous abortion, sterility

and infertility. Pesticide residues are present in blood and urine of every fourth person of Punjab's cotton belt.

- Social entrepreneurship through its innovative approaches in the service of tackling the lack of universal access to drinking water (Aquaful's proposal). Regarding water kiosk solution to tackle SDG 6, bulk vending models are attractive (to both consumers and local entrepreneurs for the following reasons. First, C&D consumers are willing to pay for higher quality than traditional bulk at a 30-50% discount vs. branded packaged goods. Second, points-of-sales have low fixed costs and quickly reach profitability (Hystra, a consulting firm). And yet, no organized network has profitably addressed safety risks at scale for three main reasons. First, unpackaged products create safety risks. Second, operators require monitoring, incentives and penalties. Finally, central organizations risk losing their added value over time.
- Philanthropy's role in increasing access to clean and safe water (Royal Ambassadors Ministries, Inc., Moses West Foundation)

Key recommendations for action

- Giving rivers and other water bodies a legal personhood, including the right to live, exist and flow, the right to be safe from pollution – and the right to take legal action (e.g. Magpie River, Lake Erie, etc.)
- Regulation and enforcement: Stricter laws to enforce existing regulations to prevent the contamination of groundwater. This includes enforcing laws on waste disposal, industrial pollution, and agricultural practices.
- Education and awareness: The public should be educated on the importance of groundwater and the risks of contamination. This can be done through awareness campaigns, workshops, and public meetings.
- Improved agricultural practices: Farmers should be encouraged to adopt sustainable agricultural practices that reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers. This includes promoting organic farming and integrated pest management techniques.
- Water conservation: Both government and other NGOs should promote water conservation measures such as rainwater harvesting, drip irrigation, and micro-irrigation. This will reduce the amount of water needed for agriculture and reduce the pressure on groundwater resources.
- Treatment and remediation: Investments should be made in the treatment and remediation of contaminated groundwater sources. This includes the installation of water treatment plants and the clean-up of contaminated sites.
- Research and development: Further investments in research and development to better understand the causes and effects of groundwater contamination. This will help to develop new technologies and techniques to prevent and treat groundwater contamination.
- Atmospheric Water Generators can provide sustainable clean water solutions around the world (Moses West Foundation).
- Social entrepreneurship in the area of the access to water can bring changes in local communities. Radical innovation is required to create sustainability at scale for three main reasons: first, frugal technology to address safety and tampering issues. Secondly, exciting consumer value propositions to increase profit pool. Finally, resilient business models to ensure sustainable win-win relationships between local operators and central organizations (Aquaul).