



**UN**  
**2023 WATER**  
**CONFERENCE**

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## INFORMAL SPECIAL EVENT SUMMARIES

### ***Summary of the Informal Special Event: Reducing Inequalities – Implementing Human Rights***

Organized by: African Youth Parliament for Water, Aquafed, FILAC, International Indian Treaty Council, UN OHCHR, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Water and Sanitation, Women for Water Partnership

Thursday 23 March 2023, 10am-1pm EDT

*Conference Room 2, UNHQ – New York*

*Special Event webpage URL: <https://sdgs.un.org/conferences/water2023/events/Reducing-inequalities%E2%80%93Implementing-Human-Rights>*

### **Background**

Please include a brief description on current state of affairs in relation to the overall theme of your session and the session's main objectives. (200-250 words)

Patterns of marginalization and exclusion are present all over the world, with stark and persisting inequalities in access to water and sanitation. Progress made to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all sector does not always benefit those who are most in need of these services, in particular the poorest, people living in informal settlements and/or people marginalised on the basis of gender and other grounds.

This Special Event was about giving a voice to indigenous peoples, youth and women and hearing their concerns and solutions. The objectives were:

- To promote 'game-changer actions' that accelerate implementation of human rights and the reduction of inequalities in water and sanitation sphere, in the second half of the Water Action Decade for Sustainable Development.
- To show States that implementing and guaranteeing human rights and meaningfully involving youth, women and indigenous peoples and their representatives, reduces inequalities faster and more effectively and sustainably.
- To convince all involved, through evidence, to use a watershed approach and increase understanding of the importance of aquatic ecosystems treatments and balanced sustainable uses while respecting rights holders and customers uses and users.
- To underscore the rights to water and sanitation as a cross cutting, transversal human right closely tied to, *inter alia*, the rights to health, life, food and subsistence, rights of human rights defenders, rights to lands, water and territories, incorporating culture and

spirituality, development, rights of the child and women, , the right to Free Prior and Informed Consent.

**See concept note:** [Informal Special Event – Reducing inequalities – implementing Human Rights | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#)

## **Key Messages**

Please highlight key issues discussed during your special event, followed by bulleted key recommendations and main takeaways. (400-500 words)

- Human rights still not being implemented at national level

Water and sanitation are human rights, but they were hardly mentioned by Member States in the Interactive Dialogues or Plenaries. Between and inside countries there are huge differences. The debates at the Conference prove that we have to work even harder to have these rights acknowledged, respected and acted on by decision-makers. As observed by the EU representative, Member States must also monitor the implementation of human rights.

Indigenous Peoples protect 80% of the world's biodiversity but they are the population with the greatest inequalities. It is important to protect lands, waters and Human Rights. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge of the environment and their care for it, must be respected in the face of agricultural and mining activities for example. It is about individual and collective rights.

- Inequalities have to be dealt with through improved governance

To reduce inequalities it is essential to improve governance. Member States need to incorporate the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, women and youth in general, into the national legislation of the countries. This included recognizing the role of Indigenous Peoples in the protection of water sources, particularly indigenous women. Savings on services for water and sanitation create a "false" economy.

Youth cooperation needs to be built in via stronger governance. For example in Africa, only a few countries have a youth policy and none of these policies have been truly acted on and successfully implemented. Every country should have a youth policy, accompanied by an implementation plan. Youth also breathe new life into the practices of Indigenous People's elders.

We also need to think about management methods of water and sanitation that go beyond public and private. Management should be governed by communities and based on disaggregated data (sex, age etc.). A mainstream, circular approach is more helpful than a sectoral approach.

To engage stakeholders meaningfully, public authorities and governments need to provide absolute clarity on how inputs will be used, otherwise this causes frustration and divide.

In Bolivia, there was a resolution recognizing the HRTWS and that is the instrument that should be pushed in other countries. In Colombia the National Development Plan has gone through major changes to establish a new social contract which will help overcome historic inequalities, improve the relationship with environment and live in harmony in nature.

- International cooperation is helping to progress the human rights and reduce inequalities. Progress has been made in recognizing the role of Indigenous Peoples, women and youth at international level. For example there is a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Major Groups on women and children and youth. There are also tools such as the UNECE scorecard that was used in Armenia as an analytic tool to address legislative gaps and inequalities and vulnerable groups. This led to a 3-year plan on human rights and changes to the national Water Code to include a definition of vulnerable groups.

However, national and global data water and sanitation masks wide national and local disparities and inequalities. A project from UNESCO has supported work in 35 countries to integrate gender equality considerations and a human rights approach to planning and policies.

Regarding donor financing, ODA etc, we need to get resources to communities directly to implement their solutions and to claim their rights.

- Domestic litigation is route that should be used to protect rights. The representative from the Slovenian Government observed that progressive discussion on human rights is much stronger at international than national level. At national level, litigation has been used by Indigenous Peoples in Canada when all other routes have been unsuccessful. The rule of law begins with respect of human rights.

### **Actions for the Water Action Agenda**

Please list all commitments made to the Water Action Agenda in relation to your Special Event. Please include the link to your commitment, if possible.

<https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/private-water-operators-federated-aquafed-will-advance-implementation-human-rights>

<https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/enabling-women-actors-water-domain>

<https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/call-action-accelerate-gender-equality-water-domain>

<https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/indigenous-peoples-global-coalition-commitment-un-water-action-agenda>