

## **OHCHR's recommendations for the themes of the interactive dialogues of the 2026 UN Water Conference**

### **Suggested theme for an interactive dialogue**

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation are human rights and indispensable to life, health, people's dignity and to the realization of other human rights. Safe, sufficient water and healthy freshwater ecosystems are also crucial elements of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Persistent inequalities in access to water and sanitation reflect and exacerbate multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion, for example for homeless people, women and girls, minorities, asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, older persons, Indigenous Peoples and those living in informal settlements and rural areas. **OHCHR recommends dedicating one of the interactive dialogues to the centrality of human rights to water and sanitation and other human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in accelerating the SDG 6.** None of the SDG 6 targets are on track. It is essential to tackle entrenched discrimination and inequalities in access to water and sanitation to accelerate progress by 2030 and beyond the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Water should not be considered primarily as an economic good. The market logic of maximizing return on investment and management of water as a commodity does not respect human rights nor the Sustainable Development Goals, and consequently, fails to deliver for people and the planet. In the context of water scarcity and overexploitation of water resources, international human rights law sets out that priority in the allocation of water resources should be given to personal and domestic uses, to uphold human dignity, life and health, as opposed to other uses such as industry or large-scale agriculture. However, taking into consideration article 1, paragraph 2, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which provides that a people may not "be deprived of its means of subsistence", States should ensure that there is adequate access to water for subsistence farming to realize the right to food. Water resources should be managed sustainably to ensure safe and sufficient water for both present and future generations, including through water pricing that encourages the efficient use of water. On the other hand, the affordability of water and sanitation for all must be ensured even in times of water scarcity. It is crucial for States to ensure **alignment of economic policies with human rights** by investing sufficiently in water and sanitation services, refraining from austerity measures, social cuts and retrogressions, designing progressive tax systems for greater equality and generating the resources needed to realize human rights for all. In the context of international human rights law, the immediate obligation of non-discrimination requires States to ensure that budget allocation and expenditure aim at eliminating inequalities in access to water and sanitation. States must also ensure the rights of access to information and public participation in the context of water governance and ensure access to justice and remedy for water-related human rights violations and abuses. The right to a healthy environment also requires that States prevent water pollution and depletion, prevent or mitigate water-related disasters and protect or restore aquatic ecosystems.

## **Overall process for the 2026 UN Water Conference**

**Human rights and human rights-based approach should be integrated throughout the preparatory process for and during the 2026 UN Water Conference.** This means ensuring safe, meaningful and inclusive participation, transparency, access to information, and accountability. The voice of rights-holders, particularly persons and groups that face discrimination or are in a situation of vulnerability, should be heard in the various thematic discussions. **The effective and meaningful participation of rights-holders, civil society and social movements representing water and river defenders** will allow them to express their views and showcase promising practices on the ground.

Effective and accelerated SDG 6 implementation requires multi-sectoral, coordinated efforts at all levels. Local governments play a critical role and have shared and complementary duties with central governments for the realization of human rights, including the rights to water and sanitation and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. At the 2023 UN Water Conference, local governments shared many promising practices developed with communities in relation to SDG 6. **The Conference should ensure active participation of local governments, local institutions and community organizations to share promising practices to achieve SDG 6.**

April 11, 2025

## **Inputs of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation for the preparation of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference**

In response to the call for inputs (Reference DESA-25/00535), I am pleased to share my contributions to collaborate with the preparations of the 2026 UN Water Conference:

Noting that the Human Rights Council resolution [57/13](#) of 2024 tasked me with engaging in the preparatory process for the Water Conference 2026 to ensure the inclusion of human rights in the agenda and outcomes, as well as broad civil society representation, I have started a platform-building process to strengthen my engagement with a diverse group of rights holders, including social movements, NGOs, and Indigenous Peoples, who signed the [Water Justice Manifesto](#) at the 2023 Water Conference. I am also working with local authorities, both municipal and community-based, who manage overall water and sanitation services.

I would further propose 4 main action points to meaningfully advance the participation of all rightsholders in the Conference:

1. **Implement a Human Rights-Based Approach throughout all the interactive dialogues.** This means ensuring meaningful participation, transparency, access to information, and accountability in the preparatory process and at the Conference. Voice should be given to rights-holders who are in the front lines of water scarcity and climate change, across the various thematic areas discussed in all Interactive Dialogues. **This involves ensuring the inclusion of at least one Human Rights Defender (HRD) in every Interactive Dialogue of the Conference,** in coordination with rights-holder platforms, particularly people-focused organizations. Their participation must be rooted in community voices and driven by the people themselves.
2. In order for this to happen, **effectively facilitate the attendance of rights holders and social movements representing water and river defenders to the Conference, including through facilitating administrative processes.** Create spaces for participation of the institutions managing water services in territories at local level. Municipal institutions, authorities and community organizations of indigenous peoples and peasant communities, share and complement duties with States to realize human rights, including the rights to water and sanitation for hundreds of millions of people.
3. **Strengthen and formalize participation mechanisms for rightsholders,** mirroring existing civil society participation mechanisms in the UN; such as the [Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism](#) (CSIPM) in the United Nations

Committee on World Food Security, the [Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform](#) (LCIPP) of the The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the establishment of a [subsidiary body on article 8 \(j\) of the Convention on Biological Diversity](#); and many others.

4. **Dedicate one of the Interactive Dialogues to discuss the state of implementation of SDG 6, focusing on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as the prospects for the post-2030 agenda.** None of the SDG 6 targets are on track to be met by 2030. Accelerated action is particularly needed to eliminate discrimination and inequalities when it comes to access to water and sanitation. This acceleration must be driven by the communities already leading change on the ground. The dialogue must be truly people-centered, reflecting the perspective of 'people' within the people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership paradigm.

Finally, it is crucial that Member States ensure the institutionalization of an intergovernmental process on water and sanitation and regular holding of this conference as an open space for meetings, dialogue, and collaboration of Member States with rights holders for the effective implementation of SDG 6 and the fulfilment of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.