



## THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION



Eight short facts on the human right to water and sanitation  
[http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/facts\\_and\\_figures\\_human\\_right\\_to\\_water\\_eng.pdf](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/facts_and_figures_human_right_to_water_eng.pdf)

On 28 July 2010, through [Resolution 64/292](#), the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights. The Resolution calls upon States and international organizations to provide financial resources, help capacity-building and technology transfer to help countries, in particular developing countries, to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.

In November 2002, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted [General Comment No. 15](#) on the right to water. Article 1.1 states that "The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights". Comment No. 15 also defined the right to water as the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

### Sources:

- *Resolution A/RES/64/292. United Nations General Assembly, July 2010*
- *General Comment No. 15. The right to water. UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, November 2010*

### The Human Right to Water and the MDGs

Formerly acknowledging water as a human right, and expressing the willingness to give content and effect to this right, may be a way of encouraging the international community and governments to enhance their efforts to satisfy basic human needs and to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Source: *Water as a Human Right? IUCN, UNDP, 2004*

### What is...?

- **Sufficient.** The water supply for each person must be sufficient and continuous for personal and domestic uses. These uses ordinarily include drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation, personal and household hygiene. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), between **50 and 100 litres** of water per person per day are needed to ensure that most basic needs are met and few health concerns arise.
- **Safe.** The water required for each personal or domestic use must be safe, therefore free from micro-organisms, chemical substances and radiological hazards that constitute a threat to a person's health. Measures of drinking-water safety are usually defined by national and/or local standards for drinking-water quality. The **World Health Organization (WHO) Guidelines for drinking-water quality** provide a

basis for the development of national standards that, if properly implemented, will ensure the safety of drinking-water.

- **Acceptable.** Water should be of an acceptable color, odor and taste for each personal or domestic use. [...] All water facilities and services must be **culturally** appropriate and sensitive to **gender, lifecycle** and **privacy** requirements.
- **Physically accessible.** Everyone has the right to a water and sanitation service that is physically accessible within, or in the immediate vicinity of the household, educational institution, workplace or health institution. According to WHO, the water source has to be within **1,000 metres** of the home and collection time should not exceed **30 minutes**.
- **Affordable.** Water, and water facilities and services, must be affordable for all. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggests that water costs should not exceed **3 per cent** of household income.

### Did you know?

- In rural Sub-Saharan Africa millions of people share their domestic water sources with animals or rely on unprotected wells that are breeding grounds for pathogens.
- The average distance that women in Africa and Asia walk to collect water is **6 kilometres**.
- Average water use ranges from **200-300 litres** a person a day in most countries in Europe to less than **10 litres** in countries such as Mozambique. People lacking access to improved water in developing countries consume far less, partly because they have to carry it over long distances and water is heavy. For the 884 million people or so people in the world who live more than 1 kilometre from a water source, water use is often less than **5 litres** a day of unsafe water.
- The basic requirement for a lactating women engaged in even moderate physical activity is **7.5 litres** a day.
- At any one time, close to half of all people in developing countries are suffering from health problems caused by poor water and sanitation. Together, unclean water and poor sanitation are the world's **second biggest killer** of children. It has been calculated that 443 million school days are lost each year to water-related illness.
- In Tajikistan nearly **a third** of the population takes water from canals and irrigation ditches, with risks of exposure to polluted agricultural run-off.
- A survey of 5 000 schools in Senegal showed that over half had no water supply and almost half had no sanitation facilities. Of those schools with sanitation, only half had separate facilities for boys and girls. The result was that girls chose not to utilize these facilities, either because they did not want to risk being seen to use the toilet, or because they were warned that these facilities were not private or clean enough. Girls also avoided drinking water at school to avoid urination, thereby becoming dehydrated and unable to concentrate
- People living in the slums of Jakarta, Manila and Nairobi pay **5 to 10 times** more for water than those living in high-income areas in those same cities and more than consumers in London or New York. In Manila, the cost of connecting to the utility represents **about three months' income** for the poorest 20% of households, rising to six months' in urban Kenya.



#### Sources:

- Human Development Report 2006. *Beyond scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis*. UNDP, 2006
- (The) Right to Water, Fact Sheet No. 35. United Nations, OHCHR, UN-HABITAT, WHO, 2010