

**Human Rights Council (HRC) Background Guide**

**Topic:** **Access to Clean Drinking Water as a Human Right**

Welcome Delegates to the 3rd annual Charger Model United Nations Conference on Sunday December 8th from 8am to 5:30 pm. We are honored, as your Dais, to host you here at the University of New Haven and to help you grow and learn as delegates from the experiences and skills that we have gained through our Model United Nations program. This conference will consist of 2 committee sessions and then a voting bloc. We encourage friendly participation and interaction between delegates who are willing to collaborate and build off of one another’s ideas.

My name is Jared Bowman, and I will be your chair for this conference. I am currently a senior at the University of New Haven studying Political Science and National Security Studies. Your co-chair will be Aneesha Kumar. Aneesha is a senior Forensic Science major with a concentration in Biology as well as a minor in Political Science. Together we will be your Dais for this conference. Our role as your Dais will be to help direct discussions and to make sure that the rules of procedure are being followed, as well as answering questions and provide feedback on the work being done. You will see us directing the proceedings during formal session and roaming during informal sessions. Please feel free to approach the Dais at any time to clarify and answer any questions.

Committee sessions are comprised of Formal Session, Moderated Caucus, and Unmoderated Caucus. Once committee is started delegates will use their placards to be placed on the Speakers’ List and there will be points throughout committee where delegates will be asked if they would like to be added to the list. Speeches will occur during Formal Session and are to be a 90 second speech from the point of view of the delegates’ country and to be focused on the topic at hand. Working Papers will be worked on during Moderated and Unmoderated Caucus. These papers should be a collaborative effort and will be turned into the Dais in order to receive feedback. Once Voting Bloc is opened the Working Papers will be adopted as Draft Resolutions and then voted on by delegates.

***Committee Charter and Mandate***

The Human Rights Council (HRC) is the main organ of the United Nations (UN) that is “responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them.”[[1]](#endnote-1) The HRC’s job is to respond to pressing human rights situations by addressing issues involving “accountability and liability for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.[[2]](#endnote-2) While the HRC has a global scope, the Council has recently been focused on several regions in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

The international human rights agenda has been shaped by two important documents: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action from 1993.[[3]](#endnote-3) As international human rights laws have evolved, specialized agencies within the UN system have been created in order to more effectively respond to human rights violations, such as the Commission on Human Rights.

In *resolution 60/251*, the General Assembly mandates HRC to promote universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; to address and provide recommendations on all, and particularly grave and systematic violations of human rights; and to promote an effective system of coordination within the UN system with respect to human rights issues.[[4]](#endnote-4) The General Assembly has also prescribed HRC with addressing violations, promoting cooperation on human rights, reviewing Member State history and performance, and preventing human rights abuses.[[5]](#endnote-5)

***Topic Introduction***

According to former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, access to safe water is a fundamental human need, and therefore, a basic human right.[[6]](#endnote-6) Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people, and is an affront to human dignity. Access to clean water is essential for the rights expressed in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to be realized globally.[[7]](#endnote-7) In 2002, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted *General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water* which outlines declares that “the right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for the personal and domestic uses.”[[8]](#endnote-8) The Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) determined water for global citizens needs to be uncontaminated, and easily accessible within a time frame of 30 minutes from when it is needed.[[9]](#endnote-9) In 2010, the General Assembly and HRC recognized the right to water as a human right. In 2015, the General Assembly affirmed that global access to safe drinking water was a global priority and named it the sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).[[10]](#endnote-10)

In the JMP report *Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and Sustainable Development Goal baselines* of 2017, it was reported that 844 million people across the planet still lacked access to drinking water, in addition to 263 million people spending more than 30 minutes to collect water from a reliable and safe drinking source.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Regional inequalities also exist. Out of 159 million people that still have to collect drinking water from surface water sources, 58% live in Sub-Saharan Africa.[[12]](#endnote-12) Communities in developing countries tend to lack the necessary financial sources and infrastructure required to implement water resource projects. This leads to greater community instability, protests, and increased water contamination.[[13]](#endnote-13) The marginalization of certain groups, like women and indigenous people, also creates barriers for ensuring global access to water.[[14]](#endnote-14) The Special Rapporteur on the human right to water and sanitation issued report 33/49 in 2016, calling for the adoption of gender-responsive measures to better address the challenges, like verbal and physical threats, women and young girls face with regards to the right to water.[[15]](#endnote-15) Overall, there are many challenges when ensuring global adequate access to water.

***History of the Problem***

The right to water is outlined many times throughout numerous international agreements. In 2010, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/292, on the topic of “The Human Right to Water and Sanitation”, in which the international resolution recognized the right to safe, clean drinking water as an essential element to life and the enjoyment of all other recognized human rights. In 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/1 titled *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda). This was designed to decrease global inequalities and establish a formal standard for ensuring access to safe drinking water as SDG 6 for the 2030 Agenda.[[16]](#endnote-16) Overall, SDG 6 aims at ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.[[17]](#endnote-17)

In addition to this, there have been numerous UN documents and conventions that are focused on the vulnerabilities that certain groups have in their right to water.[[18]](#endnote-18) Article 14 of CEDA highlights the responsibility of States parties to ensure that women experience sufficient living conditions with an adequate water supply.[[19]](#endnote-19) Article 24 of the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that state parties have to provide access to clean drinking water for the purpose of increasing the standard of living for children.[[20]](#endnote-20) Lastly, the 2007 *Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* acknowledges the right to water as a right to indigenous peoples around the world.[[21]](#endnote-21)

***Current Situation***

HRC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have identified key global issues that require increased investment from both the public and private sectors, such as prioritizing safe drinking water over other water uses.[[22]](#endnote-22) In 2008, HRC established the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation who is responsible for conducting research investigations, country missions, and promoting good practice standards.[[23]](#endnote-23) The HRC’s collaboration with other UN bodies, like UNICEF, has led to policies and strategic plans for water access and sanitation, such as the *UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017.[[24]](#endnote-24)* The promotion of children’s rights in this regard helps to further fulfill the human right to water.

The expansion of global standards on the right to water is largely influenced by the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) which focuses on identifying the factors that lead to safe drinking water and sanitation .[[25]](#endnote-25) UNSGAB increased efforts to address these issues by partnering with WHO and UNICEF in order to manage frameworks such as the JMP. The JMP has calculated that despite the international community’s efforts to address SDG 6, more than one-third of Member States are not on track to achieve universal household access to improved drinking water by 2030.[[26]](#endnote-26)

Regional organizations have helped Member States guide framework development to get local communities more involved.[[27]](#endnote-27) In 2001, 16 Member States from Latin America founded the Association of Potable Water and Sanitation Regulators for the Americas which functions as an information hub where members can share and monitor the delivery of water and sanitation services in the region, while also ensuring that the human right to water is fulfilled.[[28]](#endnote-28) Regional organizations can greatly advance the work of Member States.

***Conclusion***

It is the duty of HRC to promote and protect universal human rights around the world, and ensure that Member States are held responsible for these goals.[[29]](#endnote-29) While the progress towards human rights continues to this day, it is the responsibility of all Member States to continue developing sustainable strategies and plans that allow for the access of water services by all.[[30]](#endnote-30) Issues of systemic discrimination still remain throughout many places of the world, and the international community is required to respond with solutions that allow marginalized groups to obtain an equitable human right to water.[[31]](#endnote-31) At the same time, the HRC continues to put emphasis on the *New York Declaration for Reguees and Migrants*, the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* and the *Global Compact on Refugees*, in particular with respect to the human rights of migrants and refugees, including the human right to water.[[32]](#endnote-32)The achievement of the right to water will also help achieve many of the targets and goals of the SDGs as well.[[33]](#endnote-33)

***Citations***

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