

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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United Nations: Now is the time – all countries must support the rights to water and sanitation

On World Water Day, Amnesty International calls on every State to affirm its recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation. It calls on all States to join the 47 co-sponsors¹ from all regions of the draft resolution², sponsored by Germany and Spain, which re-affirms the legal basis for these human rights and extends the mandate of the UN Human Rights Council's independent expert³ on these rights. The Council is expected to adopt the draft resolution on Thursday, 24 March.

The draft resolution builds upon the Council's resolution of September 2010 that re-affirmed these rights as legally binding rights. In total, 177 countries have previously supported international or regional declarations and resolutions re-affirming the rights to water and sanitation. In spite of such widespread support, a small group of countries, including the United Kingdom, have resisted mainstreaming the rights to water and sanitation in UN resolutions. All States should insist that the United Nations must clearly and consistently re-affirm the rights to water and sanitation.

Refusal to acknowledge the rights to water and sanitation is unconscionable. These rights are essential for life and dignity. Amnesty International's research shows consistently how people living in slums and informal settlements have limited or no access to safe water for personal and domestic use and to basic sanitation. This has a detrimental effect on the enjoyment of other human rights across many areas of people's lives, including the rights to an adequate standard of living, education, work, health, and adequate housing. It often affects women far worse than men, undermining efforts to reduce existing gender inequalities and putting women at risk of gender-based violence. People denied clean water and adequate sanitation deserve that States act in line with their legal obligations to ensure sufficient, safe, affordable, accessible and acceptable water and sanitation for all.

It is important for States to re-affirm both the right to water and the right to sanitation to draw needed attention to the right to sanitation. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and

¹ Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Monaco, Morocco, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Palestine, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, Yemen

² UN index: A/HRC/16/L.4, available at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_16_L.4.pdf

³ In 2008, the UN Human Rights Council established a Special Procedure mandate on water and sanitation, with title 'Independent Expert on human rights obligations related to safe drinking water and sanitation'. The draft resolution that the Council will adopt at its current (16th) session will extend the Special Procedure mandate for three years as a 'Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation'.

The UN Special Procedures are independent human rights experts who examine issues globally, or focus on specific geographically defined situations, or on particular groups. They play a critical and often unique role in promoting and protecting human rights.

Cultural Rights has clarified that Article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights includes a right to water and a right to sanitation. National and international programmes to promote 'water and sanitation' often tend to ignore sanitation, and there is increasing recognition that sanitation deserves special attention to if it is to get the attention it requires.

Background

Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign mobilises people all over the world to demand that governments, corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and acknowledge and respect, protect and fulfil their rights. For more information visit the [Demand Dignity website](#)

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