

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Human Right to Water

Amnesty International expressed deep disappointment at the failure of the international community to recognize the human right to water in the final Ministerial Declaration of the World Water Forum that took place from the 16-23 of March in Kyoto.

The declaration is a step backwards, as a UN expert committee has recently affirmed the human right to water.

The Ministerial declaration defines water as "a driving force for sustainable development including environmental integrity and the eradication of poverty and hunger, indispensable for human health and welfare " and calls upon each country to act. But national governments can act more effectively if they treat seriously the opinion of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recently concluded: "The human right to water ... is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights. The continuing contamination, depletion and unequal distribution of water is exacerbating existing poverty. States parties have to adopt effective measures to realize, without discrimination, the right to water."

The UN Committee also noted that the right to water has a strong basis in international law, and it is surprising that an international conference would ignore this.

Amnesty International believes that affirming the human right to water will assist efforts to address issues of water scarcity, climate change, water quality, and the spread of water-borne diseases, and to ensure that the world's water supplies are administered in a fair and sustainable fashion.

Amnesty International believes that the human rights framework has much to offer efforts to tackle critical water issues. If the issue of access to water is addressed from a human rights perspective, we necessarily must consider the rights of all individuals to water. Disputes over water must then be resolved in ways that guarantee access, and do not for example, make it conditional on one's relative wealth, social status, or nationality.

Recognising the right to water makes it clear that governments have duties to fulfil that right. Whatever arrangements are put in place regarding private sector investment and ownership in delivering water, governments cannot sub-contract this responsibility. The rights approach also gives us the opportunity to think of scarcity of water in terms of the non-fulfilment of rights and this could give added urgency to efforts to address this scarcity.

For further information please see: http://web.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/pages/ec_briefings_water

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