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States urged to support rights to water and sanitation

Amnesty International today called on all UN members to uphold the rights to water and sanitation, after the General Assembly voted in favour of recognising the rights.

The resolution was supported by 122 countries while 41 countries abstained from voting and none voted against.

“After this promising first step, all states must now take the opportunity to protect the life and health of millions and unreservedly support the rights to water and sanitation,” said Amnesty International’s specialist on the right to water, Ashfaq Khalfan.

The rights will next be debated by the Human Rights Council in Geneva in September.

Germany, India, China, Brazil and South Africa supported yesterday’s resolution but the UK and the US, who were among those abstaining from voting, argued that there is no legal basis for the right to water and sanitation.

“There is no legal reason why countries could not support the resolution, the right to water is already part of international law and there is also a strong legal basis for the right to sanitation,” said Ashfaq Khalfan.

“Women who risk their lives when they go to public toilets at night and people whose children die due to lack of clean water should be able to hold their leaders to account over clean water and sanitation,” said Ashfaq Khalfan.

The UN said an estimated 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water while more than 2.6 billion people have no access to basic sanitation.

The vote comes after every state in the Asia-Pacific region, South Asia, Africa and South America, at several summits over the past 5 years, recognised the rights to both water and sanitation.

All 165 member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Council of Europe have also recognised the right to water.

Amnesty International’s Demand Dignity campaign aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign will mobilise 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 recognise and protect their rights. For more information visit <http://demanddignity.amnesty.org/campaigns-en/>