

# RIGHT TO WATER FACT SHEET #1: Global Statistics

## Human Rights: Why Water?

Water is essential to human life. Our very existence is dependent on it for basic health and survival. Water is also a necessary component to food production as well as other economic activities. Yet we are currently facing a global crisis in which over a billion people lack access to even a minimal supply of clean water. Many governmental and institutional approaches to solving this enormous problem have failed – causing unnecessary human suffering and death. International law and national constitutions recognize that access to adequate amounts of clean water is not only a need but also a fundamental human right. Acknowledgement of water as a human right may prove the most valuable path to addressing the challenge of providing people with the most basic element of life.

This fact sheet provides basic statistics about the global water crisis.

## SUPPLY

■ **Less than 1%** of the Earth's total water is available fresh water, the rest is salt water, locked in ice caps, or inaccessible.<sup>1</sup>

■ As population, industrialization, and pollution grow, **the worldwide renewable water supply per person has fallen 58%.**<sup>2</sup>

■ **460 million people currently suffer serious water shortages.** If the current consumption rates continue an additional **25% of the world's population** will become **water stressed.**<sup>3</sup>

Water stress is defined as an annual water supply less than 1,700 and more than 1,000 cubic meters per person.

■ **Water Stress in the Future:** by 2025 3.5 billion people (**48% of the projected population**)<sup>3</sup>

## ACCESS AND COVERAGE<sup>1</sup>

■ Population Without Access to Adequate Water Supply: **1.1 billion people (one-sixth of world population)**

■ Population Without Access to Adequate Sanitation Facility: **2.4 billion**

■ To reach Universal Coverage by 2025, **3 billion people** will need to be served with water supply.

## WATER RELATED DISEASE

■ Water is implicated in **80% of all sickness and disease** worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

■ **19% of deaths** from infection disease worldwide are water-related<sup>4</sup> and water-related diseases contribute to nearly **4 million child deaths each year.**<sup>5</sup>

■ All faecal-oral diseases can be reduced by providing adequate safe water, and improving sanitation and hygiene.<sup>4</sup>

■ **Major Diseases Transmitted by Water** (Water-borne Diseases): Cholera, Typhoid, Bacillary Dysentery, Infectious Hepatitis, Giardiasis<sup>4</sup>

■ **Major Diseases Caused by Lack of Water** (Water-washed Diseases): Scabies, Skin Sepsis and Ulcers, Yaws, Leprosy, Trachoma, Dysenteries, Ascariasis<sup>4</sup>

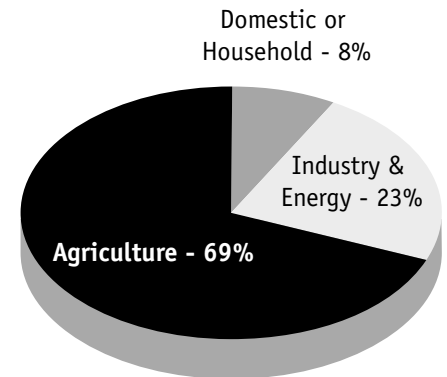
## LEAKS IN THE SYSTEM

■ **The percentage of Water Loss through Distribution System in Large Cities by Country:** Africa – 39%; Asia – 42%; North America – 15%; Latin America and the Caribbean – 42%<sup>1</sup>

■ **90% of wastewater** in developing countries is discharged into rivers and streams without any treatment.<sup>3</sup>

## USAGE AND CONSUMPTION

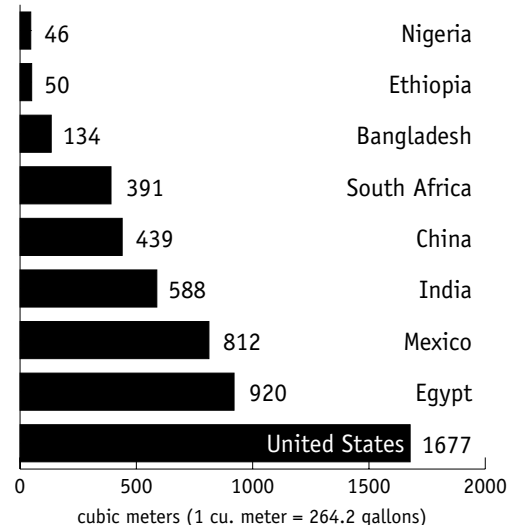
### How We Use Water<sup>6</sup>



■ In the United States each person uses more than of **185 gallons of water each day**, in Senegal, one of lowest per capita users of water, each person uses **7.6 gallons a day**, or about **one-twenty-fifth of an American's use per day.**<sup>6</sup>

### Annual Per Capita Water Use<sup>3</sup>

Americans are by far the greatest consumers of water in the world:



## INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT<sup>2</sup>

■ **Number of Rivers Shared by Two or More Countries: 261**

■ International watersheds account for **60% of the world's freshwater supply.** **40% of the world population** lives in these watershed areas.

1. WHO and UNICEF, "Global Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment 2000 Report" [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/Globassessment/GlobalTOC.htm](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/Globassessment/GlobalTOC.htm)

2. Sandra L. Postel and Aaron T. Wolf, "Dehydrating Conflict" Foreign Policy Magazine, Sept/Oct. 2000 <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>

3. UNDP, UNEP, the World Bank, and the World Resources Institute, "World Resources 2000-2001" pg. 25-26

4. WHO, "World Health Report 2002" <http://www.who.int/home/>

5. The Rehydration Project [http://www.rehydrate.org/facts/progress\\_water.htm](http://www.rehydrate.org/facts/progress_water.htm)

6. Sustaining Water, <http://www.cnie.orgpop/pai/h2o-toc.html>

# RIGHT TO WATER FACT SHEET #2: Why a Human Right?

Under international law the right to water is protected as a part of other human rights. Enjoyment of the right to water is an essential component to the fulfillment of other rights, such as the right to: food, an adequate standard of living, housing, health, and life. While the right to water is implicitly contained within other rights, there is an urgent need to further develop international standards regarding an adequate amount of clean water as a distinct human right in itself.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights supports the human right to water. Furthermore, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the legally binding documents which support the Universal Declaration, support the human right to water and national governments' obligation to fulfill this right. In addition, many countries have adopted measures within their constitutions to protect their citizen's right to access clean and adequate amounts of water and protection of their natural resources.

## WHY DO WE NEED A SPECIFIC RIGHT TO WATER?

One billion people lack access to a minimal supply of water.<sup>1</sup> Unclean water and lack of water are leading causes of premature death worldwide. Such conditions provide reason enough to take the steps to ensure that effective action be taken on behalf of those that suffer so greatly. Recognition that water is a human right is a necessary part of those steps. The legal obligation that ensues from the acknowledgment of a right to water is a needed precondition to effective action and change.

### ■ Urbanization, population growth and pollution

The current and projected growth in population further underscores the urgency of this issue. As population has grown at unprecedented rates, from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 6 billion today, the renewable water supply per person has fallen 58%.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, rapid industrialization and urbanization have increased pressures on

inadequate metropolitan water delivery systems. Informal settlements of the poor in urban areas rarely have the infrastructure necessary to provide clean water and sanitation coverage to their residents.

Pollution (often stemming from industrial production and large scale agriculture) further reduces the amount of available freshwater. This issue is important, while developed countries are fighting to take hold of an environment that has been greatly damaged by unchecked and rapid industrialization; developing countries are making decisions about industry and environmental standards within their own countries.

### ■ Privatization

Privatization, led by multinational and corporate interests, potentially threatens equitable and affordable access to clean water. In the transfer of ownership of water services to private interests, water management priorities change from need to profit. The results of this change in priorities have already adversely affected many communities that have had their water systems privatized (e.g. Philippines; the United Kingdom, Ghana, Pakistan)

### ■ Water and conflict

The scarcity of water significantly increases potential for international and internal conflict. This potential is especially evident in war-torn countries where infrastructures have been damaged or who temporarily lack the managerial capacity due to conflict in their region.

## THE RIGHT TO WATER IN EXISTING INTERNATIONAL LAW

It is vital to recognize that water is a necessary precondition to all of our human rights. Without equitable access to a minimum requirement of clean water, other rights – such as the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, as well as civil and political rights, are not attainable. It is widely thought that the language of the original declaration of human rights, which forms the building blocks of subsequent declarations, was not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather

“component elements of an adequate standard of living.”<sup>3</sup> The exclusion of water as an explicit right was due more to its nature; like air, it was considered so fundamental its' explicit inclusion was thought unnecessary.<sup>4</sup>

## AN OBLIGATION OF ALL NATIONS

Under international law, states have the obligation to protect and promote human rights for all citizens. The human right to water obligates state parties to ensure access to a basic supply of water for its people. How much water constitutes a basic water requirement is an issue under much debate. The World Health Organization, the World Bank, and the U.S Agency for International Development recommend between 20 and 40 liters per person per day. Greater amounts of water significantly increase health and quality of life. Whatever the specific amount determined, access to a minimum requirement necessary for survival is an obligation that governments must fulfill without discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

## WHAT EFFECT WILL RECOGNIZING THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER HAVE?

In *The World's Water 2000-2001*, Peter Gleick, outlines the impact of recognition of the right to water:

**Renew** international and state's efforts to meet basic water requirements of people.

**Create** pressure to translate the right into specific international and national legal obligations and policies.

**Sustain** the attention of the international community on the world's growing water crisis.

**Create** a common platform from which international watershed disputes and shared water source conflicts can be peacefully resolved.

**Clarify** that the highest priority of water management policy is the provision of people's basic water requirement; the importance of this grows as privatization intercedes on municipal management.

1. WHO and UNICEF, "Global Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment 2000 Report" [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/Globassessment/GlobalTOC.htm](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/Globassessment/GlobalTOC.htm)

2. Sandra L. Postel and Aaron T. Wolf, "Dehydrating Conflict" Foreign Policy Magazine, Sept/Oct. 2000 <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>

3. *Yearbook of the United Nations 1956*. Columbia University Press/United Nations Publications, New York.

4. *The World's Water 2000-2001*, Peter Gleick, Island Press 2000.

# RIGHT TO WATER FACT SHEET #3: Water in International & Constitutional Law

## INTERNATIONAL LAW

The human right to water has long been recognized internationally. The right to water is implicitly guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which forms the basis for all human rights. Legal precedents for guaranteeing the right to water already exist; the international and regional instruments listed below implicitly guarantee water as a human right:

- **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (Articles 2, 11 and 12)
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (Article 6)
- **African Charter on Human and People's Rights** (Article 24)
- **Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (Article 11)

Additionally the following international and regional legal instruments *explicitly* define obligations to fulfill the right to water.

➤ **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, [Article 14(2) (h)]  
“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:....(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and **water supply**, transport and communications.”

➤ **Convention on the Rights of the Child** [Article 24(1), (2) (c)]  
“States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health...States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures... (c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available

technology and through **the provision of adequate .... clean drinking-water...**”

➤ **Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts** [Article 54]  
“It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, **drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works**, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive.”

➤ **Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts** [Article 14]  
“...the following provisions shall be respected as a minimum with regard to persons deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the armed conflict, whether they are interned or detained... (b) The persons referred to in this paragraph shall, to the same extent as the local civilian population, **be provided with food and drinking water...**”

➤ **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** [Article 14]  
“Every child shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical, mental and spiritual health. States Parties to the present Charter shall undertake to pursue the full implementation of this right and in particular shall take measures:... (c) to ensure the provision of adequate nutrition and **safe drinking water.**”

## CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

Several countries have included provisions in their national constitutions defining water as a public good and legislating for fair and equitable access, thereby creating legal obligations to protect and ensure citizens' rights to water. These national constitutions provide legal models for international recognition of a right to water.

➤ **Ethiopia - Constitution, 1995**

Article 90  
“To the extent the country's resources permit, policies shall aim to provide all Ethiopian access to public health and education, clean water, housing, food and social security.”

➤ **Guatemala - Constitution, 1985**

Article 127  
“Water regime. All sources of water are public properties, inalienable and without limit of time. Their exploitation, use and enjoyment, are granted in the form established by law, in agreement with the social interest. A specific law will regulate this matter.”

➤ **Gambia - Constitution, 1996**

Article 216  
“(4) The State shall endeavour to facilitate equal access to clean and safe water”

➤ **Panama - Constitution, amended 1994**

Article 114  
“It is a fundamental duty of the State to guarantee that the population live in a healthy environment free of contamination, where the air, water and food satisfy the requirements for the adequate development of human life.”

Article 256

“Concessions for...for the use of water...will be inspired by the social welfare and the public interest.”

Two countries explicitly define a right to water in their constitutions, thereby creating specific legal obligations for their governments to ensure access to water:

➤ **South Africa - Constitution, 1996**

Section 27

“(1) Everyone has the right to have access to ...**(b) sufficient food and water**... (2) The State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights...”

➤ **Uganda - Constitution, 1995**

Article 14

“The State shall endeavour to fulfill the fundamental rights of all Ugandans to social justice and economic development and shall, in particular, ensure that... all Ugandans enjoy rights and opportunities and access to education, health services, **clean and safe water**, decent shelter, adequate clothing, food, security and pension and retirement benefits.”