
MEDIA RELEASE

Global Coalition Calls for Urgent Action Against the Weaponisation of Water

For immediate release – Berlin, 8 November, 2023

- + 700 individuals and organisations sign document calling for the immediate end to the use of water as a weapon of war.
- + Deliberate restriction of access to water is a form of collective punishment, in violation of the Geneva Conventions.
- + Signatories call on UN to respond and create robust process to monitor and sanction cases of water weaponisation.

Organisations and individuals worldwide have united [Wed 8 November 2023] to demand the immediate condemnation of the weaponisation of water in conflict, in a statement and petition. [1] Water is increasingly being used as a weapon of war, including most recently in Gaza and Ukraine, but also in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Burkina Faso, undermining the human right to water and in some cases constituting war crimes.

Targeted restrictions to water access and the deliberate destruction of water infrastructure (and of power infrastructure critical to water supply) are leaving communities at extraordinary high risk on the short and long term. These are forms of collective punishment, in violation of the Geneva conventions, in particular article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocol II to the Conventions, which requires protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Weaponisation of water further hampers reconstruction efforts and leaves communities susceptible to corruption and mismanagement.

Barbara Schreiner, the Executive Director of the Water Integrity Network [2], which launched the petition for action against the weaponisation of water, **said:**

“To be without water is a brutal undermining of people’s rights to life, health and dignity. Water is not a weapon, not a bargaining chip. When access to water is deliberately restricted, in times of crisis or calm, we’re going backwards on everything we stand for in terms of water justice.”

Dr Nick Hepworth, the Executive Director of Water Witness [3], which supports the petition, **said:**

“We know what happens when communities do not have access to water -preventable deaths of children and the elderly as diseases spread, women and girls risking their security to find sources of water, and conflict igniting as desperate people are forced to fight over any water that is available. It’s dehumanising and a complete abuse of one of the most fundamental of human rights. To use water as a form of collective punishment, as a weapon of war, is inhumane and unacceptable. We call for the immediate cessation of the use of water as a weapon of war.”

Signatories of the statement firmly assert that every individual, regardless of their location, religion, ethnicity, gender, or other differences, has a right to unimpeded access to clean and safe water, in accordance with the human right to water. Situations of crisis and conflict are no exception.

The Butterfly Effect coalition, which signed the statement, reiterated:

“In ‘Call to Tackle the Global Water Crisis’ [3] we called on the international community to prohibit and strongly condemn the use of water as a weapon of war. With our partners today, and in light of international events, we are reaffirming our position, and urging action.”

The signatories call for the following actions:

- Immediate cessation of water weaponisation worldwide.
- Global commitment to uphold the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure.
- Economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation: we call on the United Nations to develop a robust process for sanctioning countries that use water as a weapon of war.
- Creation of an international monitoring body: we advocate for the establishment of an international body tasked with monitoring and investigating cases of water weaponisation to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

The global coalition of signatories emphasises the need for unity and for swift and decisive action to protect the fundamental human right to water for all.

[ENDS]

Notes to editors:

[1] The global petition on putting a stop to the weaponisation of water was launched online by the Water Integrity Network on Change.org at this link: <https://chnng.it/ThzGZYWtXd>. The petition is supported by international water organisations and coalitions including Water Witness International, the Global Water Partnership, the Butterfly Effect, End Water Poverty, Coalition Eau, the Africa Water Justice Network, Women for Water Partnership, and SEVES. Over 700 people have signed the statement.

[2] The Water Integrity Network (WIN) champions integrity in the water and sanitation sectors to reduce corruption risks and improve service. The global network of partners aims to support the realisation the human right to water and sanitation and ensure the sustainable use of water resources in the face of climate change and other threats. <https://www.waterintegritynetwork.net>

[3] Water Witness leads research, advocacy and action on the global water crisis. www.waterwitness.org

[4] The Butterfly Effect published its ‘[Wake-Up Call to Tackle the Global Water Crisis](#)’ in March 2022 ahead of the World Water Forum in Dakar and the UN Conference on Water in New York. <https://www.effetpapillon.org/>

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