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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 August 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Grave Violation of Human Rights: The Deliberate Targeting of Water Infrastructure in Gaza and Its Impact on the Fundamental Right to Water and Sanitation

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has resulted in severe and deliberate attacks on essential infrastructure, particularly water and sanitation facilities, by Israeli military forces. These actions have left millions of Palestinians without reliable access to clean water, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. The right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, recognized under international law and essential for the survival, dignity, and well-being of all people. This statement highlights the critical issue of water insecurity in Gaza, examines the legal implications of these attacks, and calls for urgent action from the United Nations, including the imposition of sanctions on Israel.

The Situation in Gaza: A Water Crisis Worsened by Conflict

Gaza's water and sanitation infrastructure has been in a state of crisis for many years due to the Israeli blockade, repeated military offensives, and the overall impact of the occupation. The recent escalation of violence, particularly the targeted attacks on water infrastructure by Israeli forces, has pushed this crisis to catastrophic levels.

1. Destruction of Water Infrastructure:

o Israeli airstrikes and shelling have caused significant damage to Gaza's water and sanitation facilities, including desalination plants, wastewater treatment facilities, pipelines, and wells. The destruction of this critical infrastructure has severely limited the availability of clean drinking water and has led to the contamination of water sources, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases.

2. Impact on Civilians:

o The deliberate targeting of water infrastructure has had devastating consequences for Gaza's civilian population. Over two million people, many of whom are children, are now facing severe water shortages. The lack of clean water exacerbates the humanitarian crisis, contributing to widespread health issues, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. The disruption of sanitation services further increases the risk of outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, putting even more lives at risk.

3. Humanitarian Law Violations:

o The attacks on Gaza's water infrastructure represent a clear violation of international humanitarian law, particularly the principles of distinction and proportionality. Under the Geneva Conventions, attacks must distinguish between military targets and civilian infrastructure, and any military action must be proportionate to the threat posed. The deliberate targeting of water infrastructure, which is indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, constitutes a war crime and must be unequivocally condemned by the international community.

The Right to Water and Sanitation: A Fundamental Human Right

Access to clean water and sanitation is not only a basic necessity for survival but is also recognized as a fundamental human right under international law. The United Nations General Assembly, through Resolution 64/292, explicitly recognizes the human right to water and sanitation, acknowledging that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential for the realization of all human rights.

1. Obligations Under International Law:

o Israel, as an occupying power, has an obligation under international law to ensure the well-being of the population under its control, including their access to essential services such as water and sanitation. The deliberate destruction of water infrastructure and the ongoing blockade that prevents the repair and reconstruction of these facilities are clear violations of Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and other international treaties.

2. Impact on Public Health and Dignity:

o Denying access to clean water and sanitation not only jeopardizes public health but also undermines human dignity. The right to water and sanitation is closely linked to other human rights, including the right to life, the right to health, and the right to an adequate standard of living. The current situation in Gaza represents a gross violation of these rights, with millions of people being deprived of their basic needs due to deliberate military actions.

Recommendations to the United Nations and Call for Sanctions on Israel

The situation in Gaza demands an urgent and robust response from the international community, particularly from the United Nations. The following recommendations outline the actions needed to address this crisis and hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law:

1. Immediate Ceasefire and Protection of Civilian Infrastructure:

o The United Nations must call for an immediate ceasefire and demand that Israel halt all attacks on civilian infrastructure, including water and sanitation facilities. The protection of civilian infrastructure is a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law, and its violation must be met with strong international condemnation.

2. Independent Investigation and Accountability:

o The United Nations should establish an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate the attacks on Gaza's water infrastructure. This commission should have the mandate to collect evidence, identify those responsible for the attacks, and recommend legal actions, including referrals to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for prosecution of war crimes.

3. Sanctions and International Pressure:

o The United Nations Security Council should impose targeted sanctions on Israel, including economic sanctions and travel bans on Israeli officials responsible for ordering and carrying out attacks on civilian infrastructure. These sanctions should remain in place until Israel complies with its obligations under international law, including ending the blockade of Gaza and allowing for the repair and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure.

4. Humanitarian Assistance and Reconstruction:

o The United Nations, in coordination with other international organizations, should launch an emergency humanitarian response to address the immediate water and sanitation needs in Gaza. This response should include the provision of clean drinking water, repair of water and sanitation facilities, and support for the health sector to prevent the spread of waterborne diseases. Additionally, a comprehensive reconstruction plan should be developed to rebuild Gaza's water infrastructure, with guaranteed access and protection from future attacks.

5. Support for Long-term Solutions:

o The United Nations must work towards a long-term solution that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict, including the occupation of Palestinian territories and the blockade of Gaza. This includes supporting efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace based on international law and United Nations resolutions, ensuring the protection of the rights of all people in the region, including their right to water and sanitation.

6. International Advocacy and Public Awareness:

o The United Nations should lead a global advocacy campaign to raise awareness about the situation in Gaza, particularly the impact of the conflict on water and sanitation. This campaign should aim to mobilize international support for the protection of civilian infrastructure and the enforcement of international law. It should also highlight the broader humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the need for a comprehensive and just resolution to the conflict.

Conclusion

The deliberate targeting of water infrastructure in Gaza by Israeli military forces represents a grave violation of international humanitarian law and the fundamental human right to water and sanitation. The humanitarian consequences of these actions are devastating, with millions of Palestinians being deprived of clean water and adequate sanitation, putting their health, dignity, and lives at risk.

The United Nations has a moral and legal obligation to intervene and take decisive action to protect the rights of the people of Gaza. The recommendations outlined in this statement provide a clear path forward for the international community to address this crisis and hold Israel accountable for its actions. By imposing sanctions, launching independent investigations, providing humanitarian assistance, and advocating for long-term solutions, the United Nations can help to ensure that the rights of the Palestinian people are upheld and that those responsible for these violations are brought to justice.

The international community must act with urgency and determination to prevent further atrocities and to protect the basic human rights of those living in Gaza. The right to clean water and sanitation is a right that cannot be denied, and it is the responsibility of all nations to ensure that this right is respected and protected.
