

Background Guide
General Assembly 2
Global Water Security



I. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is the organization's central deliberative body. Established in 1945 in the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly has served a significant role in international diplomacy for seventy-five years. The General Assembly, along with the Security Council, is headquartered in New York City on extraterritorial grounds, affirming the special nature of the Assembly as an international forum dedicated to peace, cooperation, and understanding. The General Assembly is mandated to consider "any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the present Charter" and to make resolutions addressing those concerns.¹

As such, the General Assembly both oversees and exercises advisory ability over the other organizations and bodies existing within the UN system. The issues brought before the Assembly range from concerns regarding sustainable development to international disputes over territory, and to some degree also global security concerns, though these typically fall under the purview of the United Nations Security Council. Every one of the 193 members of the United Nations has a seat in the General Assembly, though there are also several non-member observers including the Holy See, State of Palestine, and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Each full member is allocated one vote on issues brought before the Assembly and no vote is weighed more heavily than any other. The Assembly's role as an advisory body allows it to recommend courses of action and to refer matters to other United Nations organizations, offices, programs, and commissions.² Resolutions passed by the General Assembly are legally non-binding but provide a powerful framework for global change and cooperation.

The General Assembly's ability to create subsidiary organizations and delegate responsibility for the management and implementation of international agreements is the foundation of enacting positive change on an international level. The GA Second Committee is one of six specialized committees by the GA and largely focuses on advancing towards the internationally agreed development goals, including the SDG's. This UN development agenda covers economic, social, and environmental issues of profound importance to all countries and all people.³

II. Statement of the Issues

According to UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), water scarcity is "the point at which the aggregate impact of all users impinges on the supply or quality of water under prevailing institutional arrangements to the extent that the demand by all sectors, including the environment, cannot be satisfied fully."⁴ Water scarcity is a relative concept and can occur at any level of supply or demand.⁵ The amount of water that can be physically accessed varies as supply

¹ United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*. Ch. I, Art. 10.

² Ibid

³ "Second Committee of the General Assembly," United Nations (United Nations)

⁴ "Water Scarcity | International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

⁵ Ibid

and demand changes. Water scarcity intensifies as demand increases and/or as water supply is affected by decreasing quantity or quality.⁶ As the global population increases, and resource intensive economic development continues, many countries' water resources and infrastructure are failing to meet accelerating demand. Climate change is also negatively impacting water scarcity. The impacts of a changing climate are making water more unpredictable. Terrestrial water shortage – the water held in soil, snow, and ice – is diminishing. This results in increased water scarcity, which disrupts societal activity.⁷

Women and girls are the most negatively impacted by water scarcity. Poor and marginalized groups are on the frontlines of any water scarcity crisis, affecting their ability to maintain good health, protect their families and earn a living.⁸ Water scarcity takes a greater toll on women and girls also because they are often the ones to collect it. When water is further away, it requires more time to collect, which often means less time at school.⁹ Particularly for girls, a shortage of water in schools impacts student enrollment, attendance, and performance. Carrying water long distances is also an enormous physical burden and can expose children to safety risks and exploitation.¹⁰

According to UNICEF, four billion people – almost two-thirds of the world's population – experience severe water scarcity for at least one month each year.¹¹ Half of the world's population could be living in areas facing water scarcity by as early as 2025. Some 700 million people could be displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030 and over two billion people live in countries where water supply is inadequate. By 2040, roughly 1 in 4 children worldwide will be living in areas of extremely high water stress.¹² Water scarcity is also an economic issue. According to the World Bank, water scarcity could cost some regions up to 6% of their GDP, spur migration and spark conflict.¹³ Water will become scarce in regions where it is currently abundant – Central Africa and East Asia – and scarcity will worsen in regions where water is already in short supply such as the Middle East and the Sahel in Africa.¹⁴ Water scarcity could multiply the risk of conflict. Food price spikes caused by droughts can inflame latent conflicts and drive migration. Places where economic growth is impacted by rainfall, episodes of droughts and floods have generated waves of migration and spikes in violence within countries.¹⁵

III. History & Past UN Action

One of the most important milestones has been the recognition in July of 2010 by the UN General Assembly of the human right to water and sanitation.¹⁶ The Assembly recognized the

⁶ "Water Scarcity," United Nations UN Water (United Nations)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ "Water Scarcity," UNICEF (UNICEF)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "High and Dry: Climate Change, Water, and the Economy," World Bank (World Bank Group, May 3, 2016)

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Global Issues - Water," United Nations: Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet (United Nations)

right of every human being to have access to enough water for personal and domestic uses, meaning between 50 and 100 liters of water per person per day. The water must be safe, acceptable, and affordable. The water costs must not exceed 3 percent of household income. Moreover, the water source must be within 1,000 meters of the home and collection time should not exceed 30 minutes.¹⁷ The UN has also created the Sustainable Development Goals, which include water access to all.

For decades, the UN has called upon nations to gather to solve food insecurity. In 2015, member states created and adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere.¹⁸ These goals are a part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the goals.¹⁹ Water scarcity falls under SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all and according to the UN, current estimations show that 2.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water and more than 4.2 billion people lack safe sanitation.²⁰

In 2000, the Millennium Development Declaration called for the world to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water as well as the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation. In 2003, the International Year of Freshwater was declared by the General Assembly, followed by the “Water for Life” Decade from 2005 to 2015. To coordinate the efforts of UN entities and international organizations working on water and sanitation issues, the Chief Executive Board of the UN established UN Water in 2003 – a UN inter-agency coordination mechanism for all freshwater and sanitation related issues.²¹

IV. Latest Developments

In December 2016, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution “International Decade for Action – Water for Sustainable Development” to help put a greater focus on water for ten years. Emphasizing that water is critical for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger, UN member states expressed deep concern over the lack of access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene as well as water related disasters, scarcity and pollution being exacerbated by population growth, climate change and desertification.²² The new decade will focus on sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives and on the implementation of related programs and projects. Also, the new decade will focus on the furtherance of cooperation and partnership at all levels to help achieve internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²³ The

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “The Sustainable Development Agenda - United Nations Sustainable Development,” United Nations (United Nations)

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ “Water and Sanitation,” United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations)

²¹ Ibid

²² “Water Action Decade,” UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations)

²³ Ibid

Decade commenced on World Water Day in March 2018 and will terminate on World Water Day in March 2028.²⁴

V. Problems that Resolutions Should Address

The issue of global water security has expanded over decades as climate change, conflict, the COVID pandemic, growing global population, limited resources, desertification increases the number of people experiencing physical and/or economic water scarcity. Several interrelated issues need to be addressed while addressing food insecurity.

Delegates are encouraged to consider the following issues and questions in their research and position paper:

- Has the international community created sufficient recommendations to address global water scarcity?
- Could water financing help or hinder the end of global water scarcity?
- How has the COVID pandemic exacerbated water scarcity?
- Can private-public partnerships benefit marginalized groups in terms of water security within your country?

VI. Helpful Sources

- UN Water <https://www.unwater.org/>
- UN Sustainable Development Goals <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- World Bank <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>

²⁴ Ibid

Endnotes

1. United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*. Ch I, Art. 10.
2. Ibid
3. "Second Committee of the General Assembly," United Nations (United Nations)
4. "Water Scarcity | International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
5. Ibid
6. "Water Scarcity," United Nations UN Water (United Nations)
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9. "Water Scarcity," UNICEF (UNICEF)
10. Ibid
11. Ibid
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13. "High and Dry: Climate Change, Water, and the Economy," World Bank (World Bank Group, May 3, 2016)
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16. "Global Issues - Water," United Nations: Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet (United Nations)
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20. "Water and Sanitation," United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations)
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22. "Water Action Decade," UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations)
23. Ibid
24. Ibid

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<https://www.unicef.org/wash/water-scarcity>.

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