

Human Right to Water and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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Outline

- I. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- II. Emergence and recognition of a right to safe drinking water

Section I

2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – Goal 7

To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

- Almost 750 million people lack access to an improved source of drinking water
- Almost one billion people are still without access to basic sanitation

2015 Sustainable Development Goals - Goal 6

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- 6.1 By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
- 6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

Principles of human rights law

- Progressive elimination of inequalities in access to water
- Water must be free from contamination
- Price for water and sanitation services must not present a barrier to accessing water

Section II

General Comment No. 15 on the Right to Water – UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2002)

“The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use”

- Availability : sufficient and continuous water
- Quality : safe water
- Accessibility : indiscriminate and affordable

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 64/292: The human right to water and sanitation (July 2010)

“Recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights”

[122 in favour, 0 against and 41 abstentions]

Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council 15/9: Human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation (October 2010)

“The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human dignity”

[Adopted without a vote]

Implications of the right to water and sanitation

- Obligations with immediate effect: States must ensure that actors – public and private – comply with the requirements of the human right to water and sanitation
- Obligations implying gradual implementation of the right to water and sanitation: development of national laws depending on the means and capacities available

Final remarks

- ➔ SDGs do not mention explicitly the right to water
- ➔ SDGs should be interpreted in the light of international law, in particular human rights law
- ➔ Universality and equal access to water based on economic affordability

Thanks!

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