

## The Human Right to Water and Sanitation: the Foundation of SDG 6

Water is essential for life, human dignity, and the health of people and planet. It is integral to our social, environmental, and cultural commons. The human right to water and sanitation is, therefore, foundational to the realization and enjoyment of all other human rights. In September 2016, United Nations Member States committed themselves to ensuring access to safe drinking water and to sanitation in Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 6). They explicitly reaffirmed their commitment to the human right to water and sanitation in paragraph 7 of the Agenda's declaration. This particular proclamation is just one in a long history of acknowledgement of the human right to water and sanitation by Member States and UN agencies.<sup>1 2</sup>

Despite this history, a strong push is being made for private sector participation in, and private financing of, the implementation of SDG 6, a development strategy that has historically prevented universal access to and enjoyment of the human right to water and sanitation.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on privatization disregards overwhelming evidence that, due to significant gaps in existing legal instruments for transnational corporate accountability, privatization of essential services frequently foments human rights violations in the name of profit for corporate investors. In response to this threat, the NGO Mining Working Group is collaborating with hundreds of water justice organizations around the globe to advocate for a human rights-based approach to the implementation of SDG 6. Such an approach would help to ensure monitoring and accountability for all development actors and strengthen the role of States as the primary duty bearers for guaranteeing the rights of individuals and communities.

In this interactive dialogue, panelists will discuss the intersection of the human right to water and sanitation and water justice with poverty eradication, gender equality, hunger eradication, good health, climate action, and sustainable communities. The speakers will address the cross-cutting and multidimensional nature of this vital life source and its foundational role in the realization of all human rights. Their diverse perspectives will offer an opportunity to envisage a just, rights-based implementation of SDG 6 and its implications for sustainable development as a whole. Additionally, panelists will identify and analyze several development implementation pitfalls that are currently threatening the viability of the 2030 Agenda, the well-being of the world's peoples, and the habitability of the planet.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *Substantive Issues Arising in the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*; General Comment No. 15, The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/2002/22, para 2 (2002). Article 12, General Comment 15 describes the content of the right as requiring: (1) availability; (2) quality; and (3) accessibility, the last of which was further divided into four sub-categories: (a) physical accessibility; (b) economic accessibility; (c) non-discrimination; and (d) information accessibility.”)

<sup>2</sup> *Resolution on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation*, UN Doc. A/RES/70/169. Adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2015, this document outlines the long history of the Member States' acknowledgment of the human rights to water and sanitation.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.blueplanetproject.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/PublicWaterForAll-Mar14-Finance1.pdf>