

Dear Natalie,

we refer to Louise Arbour's fax request to UNHCR dated 8 March as well as to our telephone conversation this afternoon. As discussed, I like to provide you with rather condensed UNHCR input pursuant to para 5 of the Decision 2/104 of the Human Rights Council's.

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a) Views on international human rights obligations to be taken into account in relation to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

While UNHCR is not a party to nor directly obliged under international human rights treaties, it is UNHCR's understanding that all UN entities have a responsibility to ensure that human rights are promoted and protected through and within its operation in the field. UNHCR therefore is committed to respect and promote human rights standards related to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation and to considers these rights in the design and implementation of its assistance programs on behalf of persons of concern.

b) How these human rights obligations related to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation have been integrated into your organization's programmes, plans, strategies or emergency interventions.

Water and sanitation are two key essential sectors which must be considered in order to secure refugees' survival, health, well-being and dignity. Addressing gaps in the enjoyment of their right to safe drinking water and sanitation by refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, are therefore part and parcel of our global strategic objectives, annual programme planning and field interventions in particular, but not confined to camp situations.

c) The impact of these programmes, plans, strategies, emergency interventions or other measures in promoting or restricting equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Programmes are implemented mostly through UNHCR's implementing partners and have generally lead to a significant improvement of access of refugees and other persons of concern to safe drinking water and in most situations applicable minimum standards can be reached. In light of sometimes limited natural water resources , operational constraints and depending on the operational environment, in often remote and inhospitable locations the impact of activities may, however, vary from one operation to other and sometimes requires UNHCR to compromise on standards as to the amount of water being available for each individual.

d) Examples of approaches considered to represent "best practice" related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation and any other existing initiatives or standards relating to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and the scope and legal status of these initiatives..

UNHCR continuously strives to provide basic services, meet minimum standards and to improve its interventions in the water and sanitation sectors , taking into account beneficiaries' needs and securing their maximum participation in programme planning and operation/management .

For this purpose UNHCR has developed and implemented a set of standards and indicators, which inter alia address the water and sanitation sectors and which serve as a basic monitoring tool in the field since 2004. (see updated version: Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations, February 2006, which has been widely distributed in hard copy and CD-ROM and is also available in the UNHCR web site:

<http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/40eaa9804.pdf>)

This practical guide was prepared taking into account the standards developed by the organization over decades of its experience working for refugees and the displaced.

Rights based approaches to UNHCR assistance activities, including in relation to water and sanitation, are also addressed in the offices training efforts and training and reference manuals. (for an example, please refer to the attached excerpt from our "Toolkit for Technical Support")

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We hope this is of help and will be pleased if UNHCR's input will be appropriately reflected in the resulting study. Grateful you confirm receipt of this mail.

Warmest regards Christoph