



# World Water Council

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## The Right to Water

**For the attention of Madame Louise Arbour,  
United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights**

First of all, the World Water Council would like to express its great satisfaction that the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has been requested by the Human Rights Council to lead a detailed study on human rights obligations related to access to water and sanitation.

No one contests that every individual should enjoy access to water and sanitation to meet their basic needs and to live in dignity.

The World Water Council recognizes the existence of the right to water as it is described in General Comment 15 (2002) of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the right to sanitation as it is described in the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human rights Guidelines for the Realization of the Right to Drinking Water and Sanitation (2006).

Over the past three years, members of the World Water Council have worked on clarifying 'the right to water', its meaning and the different ways of implementing it. The World Water Council has promoted a wider discussion on this issue through the 4<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum. At this gathering, it presented a synthesis report "Right to Water: From Concept to Implementation."<sup>1</sup> This report highlights the various dimensions and views towards the 'right to water' and the implementation of the concept.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum (Mexico City, March 2006), a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society groups, NGOs, Parliamentarians, private companies and local authorities, affirmed the existence of a right to water. The discussions before, during and after the Forum encouraged several countries such as France to include the right to water in their legislations. Recently, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands have officially recognised the right to water

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<sup>1</sup> March 2006. Available at: <http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/index.php?id=1748>

as a basis for their development cooperation programmes. In doing so, they join countries such as Uruguay or South Africa, which have been working for years to support the right to water.

To implement the right to water, it is essential to recognise it in national policies and legislation and to provide support to it through targeted programmes. At present, the major challenge is to promote the concept and support local practical actions towards realising access to water and sanitation for all.

In doing so, one has to realise that implementing the right to water in countries where nearly all of the population has access to safe water has a different meaning than in countries where a large portion of the population does not yet have this access. In the first case, the challenge is to make the right to water enforceable. In the second case, the right to water can be powerful in mobilizing all stakeholders and in putting equitable and affordable access to water services higher on the political agenda.

Therefore, the World Water Council continues to work on this issue and pursues its efforts to clarify how an effective implementation of the right to water could be achieved. With over 300 member organisations, the World Water Council would also be pleased to support the activities led by the High Commissioner on Human Rights in view of facilitating the discussion with the wider water community and representing their views to the HCHR. The 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum in 2009 in Istanbul will provide an opportunity to spotlight the progress that has been achieved in this domain.

Finally, the World Water Council would like to call attention to the fact that, although the right to sanitation is considered to be one part of the right to water, these two rights are essentially different in nature. A better understanding is required of what the right to sanitation means and what could be its implications. In this aim, the World Water Council suggests that a further study on the right to sanitation be carried out under the auspices of the Human Rights Council.