

## THREE PILLARS, TWO ANNIVERSARIES, ONE WATER

Today is the 10th anniversary of the recognition by the United Nations General Assembly of “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.”

June 2020 marked the 75th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter, established over the three pillars of peace and security, human rights, and development. These pillars are as relevant today as they were in June 1945, when the world was recovering from the devastation of World War II. There is little disagreement now that collective action and solidarity is essential to tackle the global issues of our times.

Given the significance of these anniversaries, Water Policy Group calls on governments and development partners to rectify the lamentable lack of access to clean water by many in the global community and accelerate efforts to universally deliver this fundamental human right.

Water bridges the three pillars of the UN Charter and is also essential for realizing many other human rights:

*“Water is necessary to produce food (right to adequate food) and ensure environmental hygiene (right to health). Water is essential for securing livelihoods (right to gain a living by work) and enjoying certain cultural practices (right to take part in cultural life).”<sup>1</sup>*

Human rights to water and sanitation are also embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals, which include ensuring access to water and sanitation for all people. Having access to safe water can be a determining element to cut perpetual poverty. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to clean water and appropriate sanitation is literally a matter of life and death.

Water Policy Group has urged governments to base water decision-making on a human rights approach. This means prioritising the provision of services to the people and communities who are most vulnerable and not protected by existing safety nets. In many cases, this will require political leadership to reconsider conventional approaches, and change legislation and budgetary priorities.

Water Policy Group calls on governments to take the opportunity of unprecedented investment in COVID-19 response measures, disaster risk reduction, climate change-related initiatives and development actions to deliver on the human rights to water and sanitation. To do so, many governments will need to:

- empower and engage local communities;
- ensure frameworks and incentives are in place for the private sector to play a greater role; and
- find new ways for the disadvantaged, in particular women and youth, those with disabilities and other underprivileged groups, to receive the services they need to enjoy their human right to an adequate standard of living.

The concurrence of these anniversaries with the worldwide pandemic and evolving awareness of structural inequalities provides an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate progress toward the fulfillment of the basic human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Water Policy Group urges governments and partners to seize this moment.

**Water Policy Group**  
**28 July 2020**

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<sup>1</sup> General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water (Articles 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), adopted at the 39th Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 20 January 2003.