



WORLD WATER DAY AND THE 2023 UN WATER CONFERENCE

*Water is life and access to
safe drinking water is a
human right*

The Water Crisis

We have reached a critical point where Earth's water cycle, on which life itself depends, is on an unsustainable course. We must take action on water now.

About 2 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water. (SDG Report 2022).

Almost 2 billion people depend on healthcare facilities without basic water services (WHO/UNICEF 2020).

297,000 children under five die every year from diarrhoeal diseases due to poor sanitation, poor hygiene or unsafe drinking water (WHO/UNICEF 2019).

Women and girls spend 200 million hours every day collecting water (water.org).

About 2 billion people experience severe water scarcity for at least one month in the year (UNICEF).

Since 2000, flood-related disasters have risen by 134% compared with previous decades. The number and duration of droughts have increased by 29% over the same period (UN Climate Action).

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



What is SDG6?

One of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 6 commits to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. This encompasses eight separate targets to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all".

Read more about SDG 6 and its targets [here](#).

Water is essential for sustainable development and underpins the other SDGs - [read more about the links here](#).

World Water Day and the 2023 UN Water Conference

World Water Day is held each year on 22 March. This year for the first time in almost fifty years, the UN is holding a conference to bring together governments and other stakeholders to unite the world in action on water. The Water Conference will be held at the UN Headquarters in New York on 22-23 March.

As we mark the half-way point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Decade of Action for Water for Sustainable Development, the world is way behind on achievement of SDG6. This year's World Water Day and the Water Conference are about accelerating action to solve the water crisis and achieve SDG6.

The water crisis (too much water, too little water, and polluted/contaminated water) is inextricably linked to climate change and loss of biodiversity. If we do not take action now on the water crisis, we are endangering all the other SDGs and indeed life itself.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

We promote and call for a rights-based approach (human rights and the rights of nature) to the implementation of SDG6 that:

- recognizes that the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation for all are human rights with an explicit focus on the most disadvantaged and marginalized
- recognizes the multiple values of water: biological (water for life), cultural, social, spiritual, economic (agriculture, industry and energy) and aesthetic
- prevents the commodification of water resources and privatization of services
- increases public financing for water and sanitation services and environmental measures to address quality and scarcity issues
- promotes commons-based water resource management to empower local communities to protect watersheds and ensure an equitable and sustainable distribution of water resources
- honors the leadership and knowledge of women, indigenous peoples and rural communities in discussions and decisions on water
- holds accountable business who continue to act with impunity with regard to depletion of sources and contamination of water for damage done to peoples and the planet

"You can't put a value on water as you can with other commodities. Water belongs to everyone and is a public good. It is closely tied to all our lives and livelihoods and is an essential component to public health."

- Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

"I really value fresh water. I think about the rivers running through our glens, into lochs and streams, supporting the fish and the birds and the frogs, the water plants coming down the lochs and the reservoirs to give us fresh, clean water and also on its way from the mountains giving us hydroelectric energy." - Jane, Scotland.



[Watch the full video here](#)

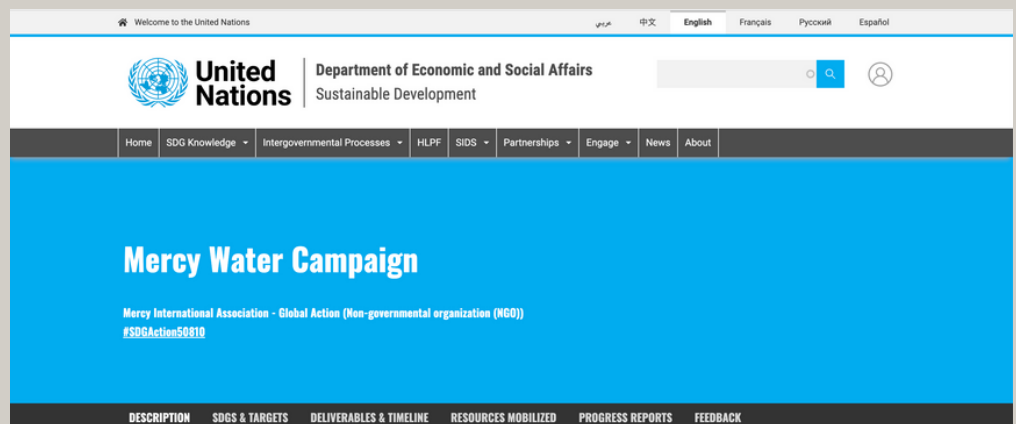
Our Commitment to the Water Action Agenda - the Mercy Water Campaign

The UN is asking for clear commitments, pledges and actions to help achieve SDG6 on water and sanitation. These commitments make up the Water Action Agenda, a key outcome of the 2023 Water Conference. Mercy International Association - Global Action has added its commitment to the World Action Agenda. The Mercy Water Campaign aims to empower people around the Mercy World to honor the multiple values of water and lead action on water in their communities and countries.

The MGA Water Task Force connected with the Mercy World on justice issues related to water and reflected on these experiences through the lens of the Mercy Justice Advocacy Approach. The project has aimed to identify, articulate and share perspectives on the value of water and how water is valued at community and country level in different countries/regions among our partners.

Thank you to Ana Maria Siufi rsm (Argentina), Angela Reed rsm (MGA), Catherine Edwards (MGA), Cathy Solano rsm (Australia), Cecilie Kern (MGA), Hanan Lachmansingh (Guyana), Helen Nolen rsm (Australia), Br. Ryan Roberts OLF (United States), Magdalene Musau rsm (Kenya), Marietta Latonio (MGA), Sam Kappler, Vita (Ireland), and Maire Cunningham (MGA) for their participation in the MGA Water Task Force. Thank you to everyone for their time, experience, resources and support.

[Read about the Mercy Water Campaign on the United Nations website here:](#)



Nelly from Honduras speaks on the impacts of "barbaric, cruel, criminal" extractive projects and the deep, ancestral spiritual connection and coexistence between communities and water. "We are going to continue fighting, we are going to continue resisting for our ancestral right and the protection of our rivers and water sources.



[Watch the full video here](#)

Water Library

Water is a very complex issue, and we are deluged with materials on the water crisis and water issues. The [Water Task Force] has compiled articles, videos and links on water which align with our rights-based approach (human rights and rights of nature) to water in our [\[link to Water Library\]](#).

This includes the must read "Water and Sanitation a People's Guide to SDG6, A rights-based approach to implementation" [\[link\]](#) along with a quick read summary. The Water Library is divided into sections. The first section is for those who want, or just have time, to "dip in" - articles and links with a broad or high-level overview of water issues as well as resources that may be useful for schools. The next section is for those who wish to take a "deeper dive" into water issues - articles, Academic papers and links on issues such as commodification and privatisation of water, water and gender equality, and advocacy on water issues. The Water Library also includes theological resources - prayers and reflections on water.

There is a brief description of each article/ link with keywords highlighted to help you navigate the resources. We will continue to add to the Water Library and keep it updated.

Points to Consider

Points to think about and discuss on water in your community and your country:

- How is water valued?
- Is water taken for granted?
- What are the key water issues for people and nature?
- How does water affect women and men differently?
- Any steps (big or small) you can take to alleviate the water crisis?
- What does a rights-based approach to water mean to you?
- What are the primary sources of water - rivers, lakes, groundwater, aquifers?
- Are these sources of water at risk of depletion or contamination?
- Who funds water infrastructure - supply and treatment? Is it publicly funded or privatized?
- Who uses most of the water?
- Who pays for water?
- What happens if you cannot afford to pay for water?
- The People's Guide to SDG6 identifies a number of red flags - do any apply?

Now, what are you going to do?

In Papua New Guinea, water has long been valued as a sacred source of health and well-being. Hear about the challenges of mining, pollution and logging destroying our rivers' nature, beauty and sacredness.



[Watch the full video here](#)

6 for SDG6

Water is in crisis. Everyone must act now; even small actions will help, and below is a list of some actions we can take, with our actions being informed by how we value water- that is, as a common good for all and not a commodity.

6 for 6 - Advocacy

Be informed: Read a [People's Guide to SDG6](#) and check out the other resources in our Water Library [\[link\]](#).

Speak up: Build awareness of the water crisis and the urgent need for action now, and break taboos - talk about the critical connection between toilets, water and menstruation.

Get involved: Become a Mercy Water Leader: join in and lead action and/or support water related campaigns in your country or region.

Build pressure with government: Advocate at local and national level for improving water at home and abroad and for public funding for water.

Build pressure with business: Be a demanding consumer and ask companies what their impact is on water sources and supply.

Make it equal: Ensure water fetching is shared between women and men, girls and boys.

6 for 6 - Practical

Reduce/Eliminate use of bottled water: If you have tap water that is safe to drink, do not buy or drink bottled water.

Eat local and eat less meat: Buy local, seasonal food and look for products made with less water.

Save water: Take shorter showers and don't let the tap run when brushing my teeth, doing dishes and preparing food; fix dripping taps and leaking water and waste pipes.

Protect nature: Plant a tree or create a raingarden - use natural solutions to reduce the risk of flooding and store water.

Stop polluting: Don't put food waste, oils, medicines and chemicals down my toilet or drains.

Clean up: Take part in clean-ups of my local rivers, lakes, wetlands or beaches.

If you want to stand up to be a Mercy Water Leader, please email Mercy Global Action - at mercyglobalaction@mercyinternational.ie

Wubalem Demese from Zaise Ealgo Kebele, Luda, Ethiopia, speaks of how Vita has helped with access to clean water leading to no longer having the challenge of long wait times to get water and the risk of water-borne diseases from unsafe water.



[Watch the full video here](#)

Pray for Water Justice

Leader: God, the very source of life, whose spirit hovered over waters at the time of creation; God in Jesus Christ, who came as living waters to quench the thirsty; God the Holy Spirit, who waters and brings forth the fruit; we come to your presence confessing our attitudes of greed, dominance and insensitivity towards your wonderful creation, and particularly towards water.

All: Let justice roll down like rivers, and let rivers roll out in justice.

Leader: We confess that we have been irresponsible in our use of water, wasting it to satisfy our comfortable lives. In many places we have commodified and privatised water, a natural resource, denying people access to it. In the name of development projects, water sources have been drained or polluted with industrial waste, causing risk to flora and fauna.

All: Let justice roll down like rivers, and let rivers roll out in justice.

Leader: We acknowledge the lack of cooperation between different authorities and organisations to manage water resources fairly. We confess our failure, as faith communities, to address water justice and seek forgiveness for not speaking out for the thirsty and the dying in situations of drought.

All: Let justice roll down like rivers, and let rivers roll out in justice.

Leader: We confess to being silent spectators as many vulnerable communities walk miles every day in search of water for their families. We regret our involvement in the commodification of water, which has resulted in contamination and reduction of water supplies. We come to your presence ashamed of our apathy and insincerity towards the abuse of water and other natural resources, asking you to inspire us to be challenged to conserve, preserve and use water prudently.

All: Let justice roll down like rivers, and let rivers roll out in justice.

- From the World Council of Churches

Sr Eileen O'Conner rsm speaks about the Great Lakes, which is the primary water source of over 40 million people. The lakes are a richly diverse ecosystem and are a gift to the US and Canada. Eileen speaks of the Great Lakes Bill of Rights, which calls for a list of protections, including the right to "exist, flourish and naturally evolve and be restored by culpable parties."



[Watch the full video here](#)