



GimBMUN 2026

Human Rights Council

Study Guide

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Gimnazija Bežigrad, Ljubljana

Human Rights Council – **Study Guide**

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Ljubljana, 2026

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Introduction to the chairs:

Dear delegates,

We would like to welcome you all to the Human Rights Council of GimBMUN 2026! We are excited to be your chairs and work with you, as well as guide you through the days of the conference, hearing your ideas, and provide you with valuable information and feedback. We hope that this study guide helps to lead you through the topic and serve as a foundation for successful research and preparation.

Chair Ms. Mia Đukić

Hello delegates, I am excited to get to know you all and work with you for the 3 days of GimBMUN. My name is Mia Đukić and I am a student of IBDP1 here in Gimnazija Bežigrad. I was born in Belgrade and am half Serbian half Croatian. I have been living in Ljubljana for almost 4 years now. I am into reading, learning about new stuff, socializing, learning languages, volunteering and organizing events. I am excited to be chairing together with my best friend after a long wait, due to GimBMUN taking a gap year in 2025.

I started with MUN at the beginning of my first year in high school and have gone to a couple of conferences around Europe, and I love it; I enjoy traveling, debating and meeting new people from diverse backgrounds. I am grateful for all opportunities I got as a result of actively participating in MUN. I hope to make this committee as inspiring and fun as my chairs in the past did for me. I wish you all the best of luck with your preparation and hope for an immersive debate.

Chair Ms. Alesia Sotnikova

Hello everyone! I am incredibly happy to finally see you all participate as delegates in our committee of Human Rights Council of GimBMUN 2026. My name is Alesia Sotnikova, I am 17 years old, and I am also a student of IBDP1 in Gimnazija Bežigrad, where we are organizing this wonderful conference. I am Russian, I was born and raised at the south, in a city of Krasnodar, and then I moved to Slovenia when I was 13. I have been living here, In Ljubljana, for almost 5 years now. I am fan of music as an art form and culture. I also like history, learning languages, reading, meeting new people, traveling and participating in MUN events. I am extremely excited to finally chair this committee with my dear friend Chair Ms. Mia since that has been our dream for quite a long time.

I started learning about MUN 3 years ago, and my passion for this activity has grown a lot since. I am happy I did not give up on it as MUN gave me lots of new opportunities. I hope that all of us will have the most pleasant experience throughout our conference in HRC, that our debate will be as productive as possible and that we will not forget about having fun as well! Good luck!

Introduction to HRC:

General:

Human Rights Council was established on the 15th March 2006, by the General Assembly by the adoption of the Resolution 60/251, and serves as intergovernmental body within the United Nations system. It is tasked with strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them. The HRC has its assembly point in Geneva Switzerland.^{3, 4, 60}

History of HRC:

United Nations Commission on Human Rights was established in 1946, and it served as subsidiary body of Economic and Social Council. It served to weave the international legal fabric that protects our fundamental rights and freedoms. The Commission on Human Rights faced criticism for its politicization and ineffective membership, and reform was awaited. In the 2005 report “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All” by former Secretary General Kofi Annan, a comprehensive UN reform was outlined, establishment of HRC was just a part of this reform. The first session took place from 19th till 30th June 2006 officially replacing the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In 2007, the Council adopted new mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Advisory Committee, and the Complaint Procedure to enhance transparency and effectiveness.^{3, 4}

Mechanism of HRC:

The council consists of 47 Member States elected directly and indirectly by a majority of the 193 states of the UN General Assembly. Elections take place annually renewing one third of the members. Members are limited to two mandates, with the duration of the individual mandate being 3 years. The Council has a bureau which consists of a president and four vice-presidents who represent each of the regional groups. Mechanisms of Human Rights Council include Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Special Procedures, Complaint Procedures, Advisory Committee, as well as Regular Sessions and Special Sessions.

The Universal Periodic Review is a unique mechanism where all of UN member states undergo a review of their human rights records every 4-5 years. At Special Procedures, independent experts are appointed to monitor and report on specific human rights issues or situations in countries. Complaint Procedures include a submission of complaints by individuals and organizations about human rights violations. Complaints are reviewed by the Council, which may then take action. The Advisory Committee consists of 18 experts from different regions conducting studies and providing recommendations on human rights issues. At Regular Sessions, which are held thrice a year, various country-specific and international human rights issues are being discussed. Special Sessions can be called to address urgent issues or emergencies.^{3, 4, 7, 16, 53}

Last 5 years of HRC:

The Council has focused on emerging concerns, including digital technology and human rights, climate justice, the right to a clean environment, etc. These were often addressed through consensus resolutions. Special sessions were convened on various crises in the world, highlighting pressing violations and calling for international action.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism continued to evaluate member states' human rights records systematically, fostering accountability. The HRC underwent regular elections in October of 2024 for its 47-member body, where the UN General Assembly

elected new members for the 2025-2027 term, as well as the Council engaged in various reforms. These reforms aim to ensure that member states uphold high human rights standards, which could enhance the Council's effectiveness in addressing issues like environmental protection and the right to water.^{3, 4, 7, 19, 20}

Ensuring the Right to Clean Water in Conflict Zones

Introduction:

As our topic within HRC is to ensure the right to access clean water in the conflict zones, our focus will be discussing how to ensure that this right is always met and how to ensure that the efforts to providing water and sanitation, regardless of nation, place, situation, gender, etc., are followed through, and met in accordance to international agreements. Access to clean water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, essential for life, dignity, and wellbeing. However, armed conflicts frequently disrupt or destroy water infrastructure, contaminate water resources, and slow down humanitarian efforts, depriving millions of people of these essential services. This discussion will delve into the legal frameworks protecting water access in conflict, the challenges in implementation, and strategies for ensuring accountability and effective humanitarian response.

Historical background:

The relationship between water and armed conflicts has always been complex and multifaceted. Water resources have been used as both a means of survival for civilians, and a weapon of war by belligerents throughout history, highlighting how water plays a crucial factor both as a basic human need and a resource for warfare within the zones of war conflict. Many times, in the past it has been proven that water can be effectively used as a tool and a method for taking advantage in conflicts. Instances such as the divert of the Arno River in 1503, when Leonardo da Vinci and Niccolò Machiavelli collaborated on a plan to divert the river during the conflict between Pisa and Florence, aiming to deprive Pisa of its access to the sea, and "Dutch Water Line" during the Eighty Years' War against Spain in the 16th century, when the Dutch implemented the defensive strategy known as the "Dutch Water Line," deliberately flooding their lands to protect towns from Spanish forces.

In modern conflicts, water infrastructure is often targeted by warring parties, reflecting the continued strategic importance of water in warfare. With constant use as tool for the war, access to water, as an essential service, becomes a basic need under siege.⁵⁸

In 1862, Henry Dunant, a Swiss humanitarian and a co-founder of the charity organization "Red Cross", in his book "A Memory of Solferino" describes the conditions of the soldiers he witnessed after arriving at the battlefield shortly after the conflict has been cased, noting that the soldiers were tortured by thirst, left in the sun without water, exasperating their injuries. To address this issue and to shield individuals from severe consequences of war, emphasizing humane treatment for wounded soldiers and civilians, the formal establishment of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) began with the adoption of the 1864 Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field, marking the start of modern IHL. International humanitarian law is a set of rules that seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It serves the purpose of mitigating the effects of armed conflicts by protecting those not partaking in hostilities and regulating warfare methods. IHL has had mixed success on this matter, characterised by

limitations due to lack of enforcement and political interference. IHL was designed for state-based conflicts, making it less effective against non-state actors, however to this day it continues to provide important protection for civilians and prisoners of war.^{1, 21, 22, 35, 42}

As mentioned before, water has often been used as a political instrument by states in the region. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which flow from Turkey through Syria and Iraq, have been a cause of conflict since the 1960s. Before then, water use by the co-riparian states was low and relations were quite stable. However, with population growth and rising water demands, each country began its own water development projects originally for water management and flood prevention, but soon also for hydropower, particularly in Turkey. These projects were launched without coordination, and while intended to manage water resources, they soon led to reduced river flows downstream, causing shortages. This created serious tensions, especially during droughts, when both Turkey and Syria filled their dams at the same time. In 1975, this situation nearly resulted in armed conflict but was resolved through international mediation. Other factors, such as inefficient irrigation, water-intensive crops, and political disputes, further strained relations. Turkey at times used water as leverage, cutting flows to pressure its neighbours and refusing to sign international agreements on fair water sharing. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, cooperation improved as Turkey, Syria, and Iraq restarted talks, signed agreements, and planned joint projects. These efforts were partly due to better political relations and the influence of international standards. However, cooperation later broke down and agreements were not officially approved. As a result, the region still faces major problems with water shortages, pollution, and climate change. The lack of safe drinking water leads to health crises, food insecurity, and forced migration. These issues undermine civilians' basic rights to water, health, food, and an adequate standard of living.^{47, 58}

In 2003, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted a document, named "General Comment No. 15". That paper clarifies that the right to have access to safe and sufficient water is a basic and fundamental human right. General Comment No. 15 states that states must respect and fulfil that right, meaning that there should not be any interference with access to water, that third parties depriving people of access should be prevented and that states should take steps to ensure access to water for all. Some other points that document has highlighted are progressive realization and international cooperation for the resolution of the issue. General Comment No. 15 is a crucial and meaningful point in the history of water access as a human right. To this day, HRC and other UN bodies use this standard to monitor and hold governments accountable for protecting and fulfilling this right for all, especially vulnerable groups.

Later in 2008, ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) reported their significant efforts in providing water access and sanitation services in conflict zones. In that year alone, nearly 15 million people in over 40 countries benefited from these efforts. The ICRC has been repairing infrastructure, building water systems, and collaborating with local partners in order to resolve the lack of clean water in war zones. Issues especially harm displaced, sick and vulnerable civilians, and the ICRC's interventions are vital for survival and human rights protection. As an example, since 1999, the ICRC began rehabilitating existing health centers and building new ones in parts of Iraq that were the scene of hostilities. In 2007, the organization constructed or renovated 13 hospitals and 25 primary health centers, many of them in the south of the country. As it was happening in Iraq, the ICRC has been heavily contributing to the protection and fulfilment of the human rights of civilians in conflict zones.^{10, 57}

On 28 July 2010, UNGA adopted a resolution entitled “64/292. The human right to water and sanitation”. That resolution is another significant document for our topic, and it reaffirms the human right to safe and clean water. Resolution 64/292 briefly:

1. Recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential to life.
2. Calls upon States and international organizations to provide resources in order to provide drinking water and sanitation for all; Encourages further discussion on the human right to water and sanitation within HRC and other UN systems.⁵⁷

During 2015 bombing of the al-Khafsa water treatment facility in east Aleppo in Syria has occurred, as a result 3.5 million people were cut off piped water, further water resources in Kurdish-held areas, such as the Alouk pumping station were targeted. More than 1.4 million people in rural Aleppo continue to suffer interruptions to their supply. As Hanaa Singer, UNICEF Representative in Syria has stated, “The al-Khafseh facility is one of the most important in Syria, producing an average of 18 million liters of drinking water daily. Drawing raw water from the Euphrates River, it is the sole source of drinking water for four million people across Aleppo governorate”. This violated the human right to water, increased disease risks and undermined health and dignity for millions of civilians - especially vulnerable groups. Such attacks on water infrastructure are illegal under international law and have caused widespread suffering in Syria.^{18, 51}

An even more recent example of why the question of water in conflicts is crucial issue to be addressed is the Tigray War (2020–2022) in Ethiopia was a civil war, where the nation fought a war with militants from its northernmost region of Tigray, then under the control of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). This conflict is remembered as one of the deadliest in recent history, it is characterized by alleged war crimes, human rights abuses, and ethnic cleansing. While the war formally ended in November of 2022, Tigray has suffered serious damages leaving the area in ruins, and its capital was turned over to the federal government. This war had a devastating impact on water supply as since the beginning of the war in 2020 the regions water sector was deliberately targeted, resulting in at least 50% of supply points destroyed while the rest was left barely functioning. As a result, clean water supplies are scarce, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases including cholera and other health issues, to acquire water, citizens have to risk their lives multiple times a day to be able to acquire water from a source which is surrounded by steep and slippery with rocks, large boulders, and sand, with the land around it being rugged and treacherous. These are just a few of many situations people all over the world have found themselves in throughout history as a result of lack of protection of water in war and conflicts.^{9, 40}

Current Situation:

Despite being recognized as essential for life and all human rights by the UN General Assembly in 2010, access to safe and clean water is repeatedly being revoked from those in the center of armed conflicts, with over 180 million people globally lacking access to drinking water as a result of these conflicts. Water is often used as a tactic of war as so called “weaponization of water.” This involves the deliberate targeting, manipulation, or control of water resources and infrastructure to achieve military, political, or psychological objectives during armed conflicts. Undercutting the very foundations of civilian survival and infringement of human rights, such actions not only deprive populations of essential resources but also inflict long-term damage on ecosystems and infrastructure, leaving

communities vulnerable for years or even decades to come. Ensuring the right to clean water in these contexts is a critical challenge that demands urgent attention and concerted action from the international community. Ensuring rights to access water in conflict zones is an alarming matter as the increase in incidents related to water in wars have been increasing in the last few years. In 2023 alone 374 incidents of disruption of water access as a consequence of armed conflicts was reported, which is a 50% increase from the previous year as can be seen in the graph titled “Trends in Water Conflicts by Type, 2000-2023” by Pacific Institute featured below which also shows that all 3 types, weapon, casualty and trigger, of conflicts have increased in the recent years. The rise in incidents can be noticed in the following years as well, noting that in the last five years over 1920 incidents were reported.^{8, 29}

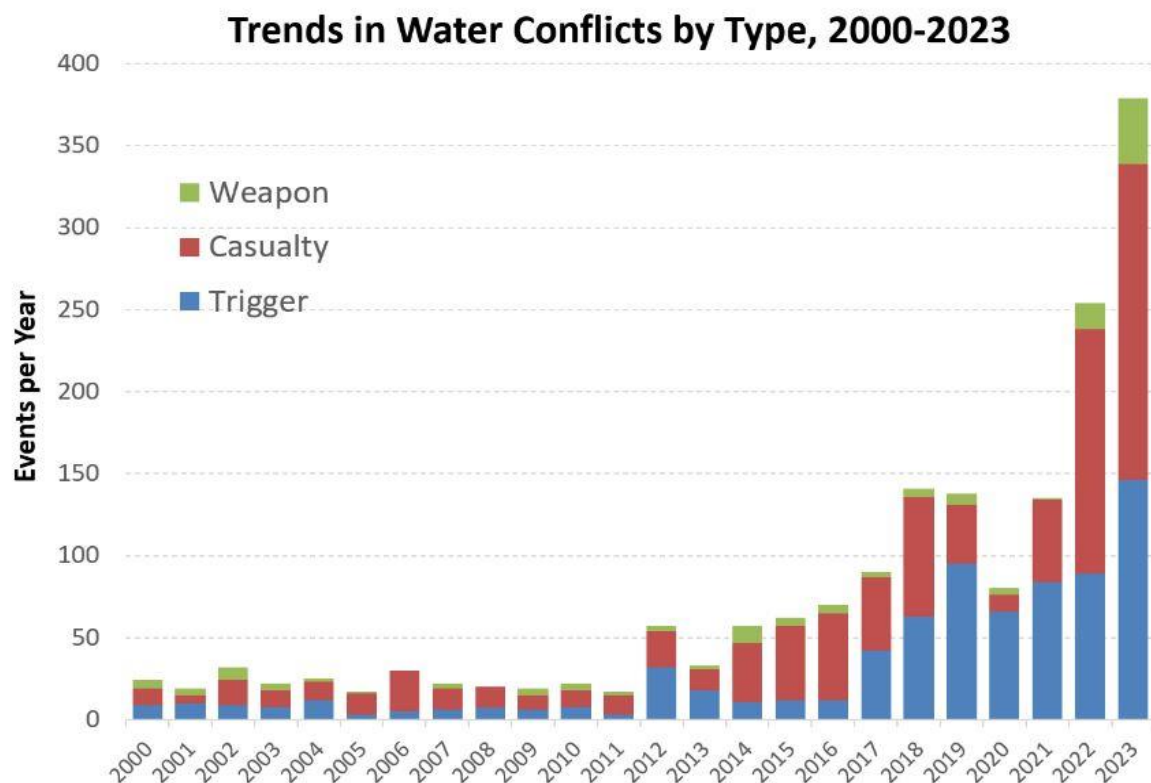


Image source: (admin@pacinst.org)

a. Inequalities and access

In light of rising political tensions and warfare in the third decade of the 21st century, access to water has become one of the most urgent humanitarian issues. Organizations such as the Red Cross have raised concerns about the increasing number of people without access to water, as well as the worsening of existing water crises due to the impacts of climate change. In many conflict zones, the question is no longer about the quality of water available, but whether people have any access to water at all.

As a result, civilians affected by armed violence also suffer as essential services deteriorate. The problem of water access is delicate and must be addressed swiftly to prevent further harm. However, solutions must be carefully considered, as the consequences of disrupted water access are long-lasting. For example, the conflict in Syria, which began in 2011, has severely damaged the water supply network. More than a decade later, the country still suffers, with water supply reduced by 30 to 40 percent. In the Sahel, climate change has intensified water scarcity, making life even more difficult for millions caught in conflict.

Efforts to address inequalities in access to water emphasize the need for stronger legal protection, accountability for violations, and innovative cooperation mechanisms to ensure equitable water access even amid conflict. Water can also serve as a platform for peacebuilding if managed cooperatively, highlighting the dual role of water as both a source of conflict and a potential vehicle for cooperation.²⁹

b. Destruction of water infrastructure and contamination of water

Destruction of water infrastructure refers to any form of a targeted attack on dams, treatment plants, and pipelines, in other words infrastructure that serves a role of allowing people access to water resources. Contamination of water refers to the act of polluting the water systems. Such acts are a form of a tactical attack as part of an armed conflict which aims to at depriving civilian populations and opposing forces of essential water resources and services, which in turn leads to severe humanitarian consequences including increased risk of disease, malnutrition, displacement, and overall deterioration of civilian well-being.

This can occur through direct attacks, sabotage, or as collateral damage from military operations. Water can also be weaponized, for example, by flooding areas or cutting off supply to control populations or territory. Destruction of water infrastructure and contamination of water both directly undermines human rights and as such are prohibited acts by international humanitarian law.

Cities and communities rely on reliable water access to meet basic needs, support development, and facilitate recovery after conflicts. Experts warn that water shortages caused by conflict-related contamination can be deadlier than conventional weapons, as they enable the spread of diseases, threaten food security, and jeopardize human survival. In this sense, any attack on water infrastructure constitutes an attack on life itself.^{8, 29}

c. Denial of access as a tactic of war

During armed conflicts in some countries, it also faced denial of access to water resources, which is when parties to a conflict take control of water and agricultural resources, allowing one or more parties involved to cut off water supply to the opposing side at any moment. Water can also be used as a bargaining tool in war; parties may withhold or restore water access in exchange for political or military concessions. Both of these falls under weaponization of water, specifically they fall into the group of psychological terror. Both serve the role of embedding fear in the civilians. Under the same category is also water as an instrument of incentivization meaning that a party at war may use their ability to restrict or completely cut off the access to water of the other party as a form of threatening a penalty for failing to comply or inversely use it as a reward when the other side does as instructed. An example of such acts would be Turkey's control of the Euphrates River which controlled the water access in Syria, noting instances of Turkey cutting off water supply to refugee camps in Syria. This form of water weaponization has a negative impact both immediately and in the long term on the health of already very vulnerable people, is one of the main causes of forced displacement and leaves severe long-lasting consequences on the mental state of the civilians. The reduction in water availability not only threatens public health but also disrupts agriculture, as crops and livestock cannot survive without sufficient irrigation, leading to food crises and deepening humanitarian emergencies.^{8, 29}

d. Human rights violated

In summary, weaponization of water leads to many human rights not being followed through, the following human rights are affected when water becomes a tool of war:

- Right to water: Use of water in wars directly violates the human right to safe and sufficient water for personal and domestic use
- Right to health: As there is lack of water spread of diseases is accelerated, also the right to sanitation is not followed through
- Right to food: Lack of water limits the food production causing famine
- Right to life: Water is considered an essential tool for life and as such when the access is limited it threatens survival, especially for the vulnerable groups like children, the elderly, and the sick
- Right to dignity: The struggle to access water exposes people, especially women and children, to increased risks of violence and exploitation
- Right to an Adequate Standard of Living: If there is no access to water, people are not able to take care of their hygiene and sanitation which are crucial for maintaining a living standard
- Right to Humanitarian Assistance: weaponization of water often obstructs humanitarian assistance which in turn results in people caught in the conflict not being able to receive relief and protection during the conflict
- Right to Non-Discrimination: Water as an instrument of incentivisation can be used as a collective punishment or to target a specific group violating the principle of non-discrimination
- Right to Development and Livelihood: Many industries, such as agriculture depend on water, when access to water is cut areas where these industries are dominant lose their ability to develop, further damaging water infrastructure often set countries back in their development
- Right to a healthy environment: Damages from water weaponization harm ecosystems and biodiversity, impacting the right to a healthy environment ^{21, 29}

e. Froze conflicts situation

Some conflicts turn into frozen conflicts where active armed conflict has ceased, but a formal peace agreement or resolution is lacking. This leaves the conflict in a state of limbo, with the potential for renewed hostilities at any time, an example of this conflict would be the conflict between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia regarding dispute of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Although this conflict is primarily political rather than military, the lack of a comprehensive resolution means that tensions remain high and cooperative water management is stalled. Consequently, people dependent on the Nile's waters especially in downstream countries, face ongoing uncertainty and potential prolonged disruptions in water access, despite the absence of active fighting. ¹⁴

Past actions of the UN and the Human rights councils:

The Human Rights Council has adopted a series of resolutions related to water and sanitation and human rights.

The Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts is an international initiative launched in 2023-2024 by Slovenia, Switzerland, the Geneva Water Hub, and partners to protect freshwater and water-related infrastructure during armed conflicts. The Global Alliance advocates for respect and implementation of international law to protect freshwater and related installations at the international, regional and domestic levels. It strives to raise awareness about the direct and indirect impacts of armed conflicts on water resources and

infrastructure, as these impacts have major consequences on the environment and across a spectrum of interlinked sectors directly affecting civilian populations.

The Human Rights Council in 2020 has appointed Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo as the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, which focuses on promoting and protecting the human rights to water and sanitation globally. The Special Rapporteur's mandate strengthens global efforts to recognize water and sanitation as fundamental human rights, guiding states and stakeholders in protecting these rights, including in conflict and crisis settings.

Creation of UN-Water - coordination mechanism, which advocates for coordinating the United Nations' work on water and sanitation. UN-Water focuses on informing policy processes and addressing emerging issues, supporting monitoring and reporting on water and sanitation as well as building knowledge and inspiring people to take action.

Past papers and resolutions:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): This declaration is one of the most important documents in the history of human rights. Specific to our topic, Article 25 recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living.

Geneva Conventions (1949): Those were fundamental to protecting civilians and essential resources in armed conflict. Specifically, Article 54 of the Additional Protocol 1 prohibits attacks on resources vital for civilian survival, including drinking water installations and supplies.

General Comment No. 15 (2003): Adopted at the Twenty-ninth Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 15 states that the right to have access to safe and sufficient water is a fundamental human right.

UNGA 64/292 Resolution (2010): Recognizes the right to water and sanitation, as well as calls upon nations and organizations to put efforts in order to ensure clean water, sanitation and services for those in need.

UNSC Resolution 2417 (2018): Condemns the use of starvation as a weapon in armed conflict and calls on all parties to protect civilians and essential food and water infrastructure. It urges safe humanitarian access, stresses the link between conflict, food insecurity, and displacement, and demands compliance with international humanitarian law.³⁶

HRC Resolution 45/8 (2020): It calls on states to ensure access, eliminate inequalities (especially for women, girls, and vulnerable groups), increase funding, strengthen monitoring, and promote international cooperation. It also urges gender-sensitive approaches, protection from violence, and action against stigma around menstruation.⁴⁴

HRC Resolution 57/13 (2024): Reaffirms the right to safe drinking water and sanitation for all, urges states to ensure access without discrimination - especially for women, girls, and vulnerable groups, through inclusive, affordable, and gender-responsive policies. Calls for international cooperation, accountability, and integration of these rights into development and crisis response and emphasizes their importance at the 2026 UN Water Conference.⁴⁵

Block Position:

Bolivia

The Nation has not been faced with the challenges of limited access to water as a result of an armed conflict; however, it is an important country in the debate in regard to water. Bolivia has consistently advocated for the United Nations and other international bodies to recognize and protect the human right to water, particularly for marginalized and indigenous communities.²⁵

Chile

On the national level Chile uses a privatized system which allows water rights to be freely bought, sold, and traded as commodities in private markets, this system has led to significant cost inequalities resulting in partial access. Further the country's legal system does not currently ensure access to water as a fundamental human right, however many social movements in the country are advocating for recognizing water as a human right.⁴³

China

China emphasizes national sovereignty and resists external regulations over water resources. It avoids binding international water-sharing agreements and supports large dam projects without always ensuring international standards. China's approach prioritizes economic development and control, which may limit cooperation on water access in conflict-affected areas, not fully aligning with international opinions.⁴¹

Ethiopia

Ethiopia's construction and filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Nile has been a focal point of regional tension, particularly with Egypt and Sudan, who rely heavily on Nile waters. Nevertheless, Ethiopia's legal framework and previous international agreements indicate that the country prioritizes access to water for personal and domestic use, even during conflicts, while also placing significant importance on national sovereignty alongside water access concerns.^{9, 14, 32, 40}

France

The nation recognizes water as a fundamental human right. This was reaffirmed at the 2025 World Water Day colloquium organized by the French National Assembly. France is a vocal advocate of protecting water-related essential services and infrastructure during armed conflicts, even stressing that water supply and sanitation systems are vital for populations and that attacks on these facilities, in violation of international humanitarian law, are unacceptable in the UN Security Council in 2023. Further, the country condemns the use of water as a weapon or as a means of coercion in conflict.⁵⁶

Germany

The nation is committed to ensuring that water is recognized as a human right, Germany has even co-sponsoring initiatives at the UN Human Rights Council that led to resolutions recognizing this right, and as such the country advocates for its accessibility in armed conflicts.¹³

Israel

Since 1967 occupation of the West Bank of Gaza Strip Israel has consolidated control over water resources and infrastructure in these areas. Immediately after occupation the country

imposed sweeping bans and restrictions on the Palestinian water sector, controls the construction of any new water installation by demanding that Palestinians obtain a permit by the Israeli army, which makes development of new water infrastructure or extraction of water from new sources in Palestine nearly impossible. Furthermore, Israel also controls collecting of rain in OPT, as well as the Jordan River denying access to Palestinians, as well as having disrupted the flow of the river to the Lake Tiberias, reducing the river to a contaminated stream unfit for human consumption.^{2, 5, 15, 31, 46}

Italy

The Nation's international advocacy for water as a fundamental human right and common good implies opposition to the weaponization of water and support for protecting access to water during crises. Italy's engagement with UNESCO's World Water Assessment Program also reflects its commitment to sustainable and equitable water management globally.²⁴

Lebanon

The nation is faced with seasonal water shortages, insufficient storage capacity, and operational deficiencies in wastewater treatment, with many plants either non-operational or treating wastewater only at primary levels. This situation limits water availability and quality for the population; however, the country has multiple projects under construction with a goal of increasing water storage and supply ability.^{6, 59}

Netherlands

The Netherlands recognizes access to safe drinking water as a fundamental human right, consistent with international human rights frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights.³³

Russian Federation

Russia may not have a specific stance on the topic, with its excessive actions of controlling water regions, demanding territorial compromises and using water as a weapon in Ukraine – Russian strategic and political interests may outweigh ensuring water access for civilians. Both sides in the conflict have been accused of targeting water supplies, but Russia's occupation and control over water infrastructure are seen as part of its broader strategic goals rather than explicit commitments to uphold the right to water in conflict zones.^{12, 23}

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia faces significant water scarcity challenges, which it is addressing through a multi-faceted approach guided by the National Water Strategy and Vision 2030.³⁷

Slovenia

Slovenia's water policies prioritize safeguarding water quality and access, mitigating risks from natural disasters, and ensuring the resilience of water infrastructure. The country recognizes water as a fundamental human right and this is ensured by several laws and by-laws governing water management and protection.²⁶

Syrian Arab Republic

Syria's prolonged civil war has resulted in between 30% to 40% reduction in its water supply. The country has faced wars where water has been weaponized by other nations as well as by non-state armed groups, placing Syria among the world's most water-stressed countries. This

weaponization of water has been condemned by Syrian civil society groups and international observers.^{18, 34}

Turkey

The Nation is considered an oppressor by Syria and Iraq as Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), which includes the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric plants on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, has significantly reduced downstream water flow to Syria and Iraq since the 1970s, with estimates of an 80% reduction in Iraq's water supply, as an oppressor it is obligated to protect the Human Rights of Syrian and Iraqi citizens in accordance to the International Law, however the country shows no such efforts. Further past Turkish military operations have repeatedly interrupted water supply from the Allouk water station, which serves around 460,000 people in al-Hasakah governorate, including vulnerable displaced populations. However, Turkey denies accusations of weaponizing water, rejecting claims that it uses control over water sources as a political or military tool.⁴⁸

Ukraine

Ukraine has faced many damages since 2022 in Russo-Ukrainian war, that has severely damaged its water infrastructure and threatened water security. The nation advocates for the human right to clean water in conflict zones. It emphasizes the urgent need to protect and restore damaged water systems, ensure safe water access and guarantee humanitarian access for repairs, condemning attacks on water infrastructure as violations of international law. International observers, such as the UK, support these concerns, documenting numerous attacks affecting millions' access to safe water.^{12, 23, 27}

United Kingdom

The UK supports international legal frameworks that prohibit the deliberate destruction or contamination of civilian water infrastructure during conflicts. These include adherence to the Geneva Conventions and advocacy for expanding international law to criminalize water weaponization. They are a part of a broader international normative shift against the weaponization of water, often referred to as the "water taboo".⁶¹

United States

While there are instances in the past where US military operations have affected water such as petroleum leaks from World War II-era fuel tanks contaminated the drinking water supply for military personnel and nearby communities in Hawaii, and US military bases having ground water contamination with PFAS chemicals that can be found in some military equipment, the country is an advocate of the importance of protecting the water and water infrastructure in line with the Geneva Convention. Further the U.S. military also plays a role in enforcing and regulating water treaties and projects, especially in regions where water scarcity could lead to instability or conflict.⁶¹

Conclusion:

In summary, in the recent years involvement of water in armed conflicts is rapidly increasing. The situation is marked by persistent violations of the right to clean water, ongoing destruction and weaponization of water resources, and significant challenges in ensuring safe and equitable access for all civilians in conflict-affected areas. This results in increased outbreaks of waterborne diseases, malnutrition, and overall deterioration of public health. These conflicts have both physical and psychological terrors, which range from destruction of water infrastructure, making water undrinkable, to deliberate denials of access as a form of a

punishment. Despite all this Humanitarian organizations, such as the ICRC, continue to provide essential support by repairing infrastructure and delivering emergency water supplies, but their efforts are often hindered by insecurity and lack of cooperation from warring parties. Urgent international cooperation and stronger protections are needed to uphold this fundamental human right.

Key terms:

Ecocide - Refers to destruction of nature by humans, in this context it refers to damages on water and nature surrounding it such as banks and soil as a result of war and conflicts.

Genocide Risks – Refers to factors and conditions that increase the chances for genocide to occur in a particular context, these factors are analysed by identifying patterns of behaviour, historical precedents, and social dynamics that precede and accompany genocide.

Water rights - Refer to legally recognized rights to access and use water from a specific source.

Irrigation Rights – Refers to legally ensured right to access and use of water for agricultural purposes, these rights are a subset of water rights.

Weaponization of water – Refers to any of use of water and water-related resources or infrastructure as a tool or weapon in conflicts to gain a military, political, or strategic advantage.

Water infrastructure – Refers to infrastructure that encompasses engineered systems that ensure access to clean water and manage wastewater, some examples being wastewater treatment plant and drinking water systems.

Water deprivation – Refers to act of preventing people from accessing and or using water for basic needs such as consumption and sanitation as well as bigger industries such as agriculture and livestock. Water depravation can be achieved through physical barriers, legal or administrative actions, destruction of infrastructure, contamination, or diversion of water sources.

Water scarcity – Refers to a situation where the demand for water exceeds the available supply, or when water is available, but its quality or distribution is inadequate to meet the needs of a population or ecosystem.

Displacement – Refers to the forced or involuntary movement of people from their residences or homes, due to conflict, violence, natural disasters, or human rights violations.

Riparian – Refers to something related to or situated on the banks of a river.

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Guiding questions:

1. Has your country been limited or limited another country's access to water? What are the consequences? Where lie the main challenges and how will you approach them?
2. How can the lack of access to water in all its layers be reduced? In which way can systematic inequalities be considered in these debates?
3. What is your country's standpoint on the use of water in armed conflicts? What is your country's standpoint on water as a human right?
4. What past actions or projects has your country participated in related to ensuring access to water in wars? What passed resolutions has your country participated in making and or signed?
5. What mechanisms exist to hold non-state actors (e.g., armed groups) accountable for weaponizing water or attacking water systems?
6. How can states strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) to protect water infrastructure during conflicts?
7. How can humanitarian organizations ensure safe access to water in active conflict zones without becoming targets?
8. What policies ensure equitable distribution of water resources among displaced populations and host communities?
9. Are existing UN bodies sufficiently resourced to address water crises in conflicts? How can the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) better monitor states' compliance with the right to water?
10. What are the reasons past actions did not work out and how can those same mistakes be avoided?

Possible solutions:

- Consider encouraging ending frozen conflicts.
- Promote accountability for attacks on water systems.
- Support building backup and decentralized water supplies.
- Consider proposing joint water management across borders and how could that be executed.
- Remove barriers for emergency water repairs in frozen conflicts.

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