

SAFE WATER & SANITATION IS OUR HUMAN RIGHT!
IUF Asia/Pacific Workers' World Water Day 2017



"The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights"[UN ICESCR General Comment No. 15]

The United Nations has designated March 22 as World Water Day (WWD) since 1993 to raise global awareness about the importance of freshwater. This year's IUF Asia/Pacific theme is campaigning for the **"Workers' Human Right to Water and Sanitation"**.

Agricultural and plantation workers everywhere in the region lack access to safe potable water at home and at the workplace. Lack of access to adequate sanitation is the primary cause of water contamination and diseases linked to water.

In addition to their waged work, women workers also have the burden of walking great distances to collect water. Women workers on tea plantations spend more than 2 hours daily collecting water for the family. Lack of sanitation puts women and adolescent girls at the risk of harassment. Walking to isolated areas is a serious threat to their safety.

Human rights are interrelated; violation of the right to water and sanitation impacts on all other rights, and where one right is violated others cannot be realized.

Lack of access to water and sanitation impacts on the right to education as well as right to health; where women have to spend much of their day fetching water they have little or no time for trade union and other activities through which they exercise their rights; lack of infrastructure for water and sanitation has an impact on right to housing; and right to adequate standard of living cannot be achieved without right to water and sanitation. In fighting for the right to water and sanitation we're fighting for all our rights.

In March 1977, the United Nations Water Conference recognized water as a human right for the first time, declaring that *"All people, whatever their stage of development and social and economic conditions, have the right to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic needs."* Since then the right to water has been incorporated into a range of human rights instruments.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), originally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966, covers rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights related to economic, social and cultural rights. This was extended to include right to water as a human right.

In November 2002, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted General Comment No. 15 on the right to water. It focuses on interpretation of the right to

water under two articles of ICESCR – Article 11 (the right to an adequate standard of living including the right to food) and Article 12 (the right to health).

The UN ICESCR General Comment 15 affirms that “*The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses*”.

Like Article 11 of ICESCR, the Committee on World Food Security has linked water to the right to food. The High Level Panel of Experts report states “*The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and the human right to food have close ties because safe drinking water and sanitation are crucial for health and good nutrition, and because access to water is indispensable for food producers, and the right to food of producers.*” In 2015, the CFS 42nd session report in paragraph 3(f) states that states or other relevant stakeholders shall “*provide access to safe drinking water to all workers at the workplace*”

Environmental hygiene, as an aspect of the right to health under article 12, paragraph 2 (b), of the Covenant, encompasses taking steps on a non-discriminatory basis to prevent threats to health from unsafe and toxic water conditions.

In 2010 the United Nations General Assembly recognized the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation; “*It entitles everyone, without discrimination, to access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable drinking water and to physical and affordable access to sanitation for personal and domestic use.*”

The General Comment No 15 has defined the basic factors for the effective realization of the right to water as follows:

(a) Availability: “*The water supply for each person must be sufficient and continuous for personal and domestic uses. These uses ordinarily include drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation, personal and household hygiene. The quantity of water available for each person should correspond to World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. Some individuals and groups may also require additional water due to health, climate, and work conditions: According to the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines ‘between 50 and 100 liters of water per person per day is needed to ensure most basic needs’.*”

(b) Quality. “*The water required for each personal or domestic use must be safe, therefore free from micro-organisms, chemical substances and radiological hazards that constitute a threat to a person’s health. Furthermore, water should be of an acceptable colour, odour and taste for each personal or domestic use.*”

(c) Accessibility. *Water and water facilities and services have to be accessible to everyone without discrimination, within the jurisdiction of the State party. Accessibility has four overlapping dimensions:*

- (i) *Physical accessibility: water, and adequate water facilities and services, must be within safe physical reach for all sections of the population. Sufficient, safe and acceptable water must be accessible within, or in the immediate vicinity, of each household, educational institution and workplace. According to the WHO guidelines, the source of water should be within 1,000 meters from home and the collection time should not exceed 30 minutes. All water facilities and services must be of sufficient quality, culturally appropriate and sensitive to gender, lifecycle and privacy requirements. Physical security should not be threatened during access to water facilities and services;*
- (ii) *Economic accessibility: Water, and water facilities and services, must be affordable for all. The direct and indirect costs and charges associated with securing water must be affordable, and must not compromise or threaten the realization of other Covenant rights: As a part of the employers' obligation to respect human right, they must provided free potable water and sanitation at the work place. For workers' who live on the company provided housing employer provided housing, water and sanitation facilities should be provided by the employer.*
- (iii) *Non-discrimination: Water and water facilities and services must be accessible to all, including the most vulnerable or marginalized sections of the population, in law and in fact, without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds; and*
- (iv) *Information accessibility: accessibility includes the right to seek, receive and impart information concerning water issues.*

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women states in Article 14 (2) *"State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women [...] (h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications."*

The guidelines pay special attention to non discrimination and equality. The comment No 15 states *"Women are not excluded from decision-making processes concerning water resources and entitlements. The disproportionate burden women bear in the collection of water should be alleviated;"*

On World Water Day, IUF affiliates in India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Nepal will be taking action to highlight their struggles for the right to water and sanitation.

Tea plantation workers in Assam and West Bengal, India will hold meetings to raise the demand for access to the right to water and sanitation at the workplace and at the company provided housing. The water and sanitation teams did research in the plantation to identify the available water and sanitation facilities and are drafting a demand of required facilities both at the workplace and in housing lines. The water and sanitation teams also organize educational meetings with workers in the plantations.

Sindh Haryani Union, the first women agricultural workers' union in Pakistan, has been campaigning for better access to potable water at home and at the workplace, clean and safe water storage facilities, and sufficient water for household use. On World Water Day, the union will take action to put more pressure on the landlords and employers to meet the workers' demands.

Our agriculture affiliates GALU in India and AFFM-IUF in Myanmar have been campaigning to defend land rights to secure the use of land and access to water for small farmers and agricultural workers. The land rights campaign is about resisting land grabs and recovering stolen land.

* * *