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Human Rights Index

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HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX

*Prepared by the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR)**

The UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which oversees implementation of the landmark 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, has declared “access to water” to be a universal human right, “a public commodity fundamental to life and health.” Currently about one-sixth of the world’s population (1.1 billion people) is denied this right. If current water-use patterns continue, two out of every three people worldwide will not have adequate water come 2025. Accordingly, the UN has outlined Millennium Development Goals in which every developed country is asked to contribute 0.7% of its gross national income to ensure adequate drinking water for 500 million people by 2015.

- 1: Number of children killed every eight seconds by waterborne diseases (about the time it takes to read this fact), responsible for 80% of deaths in the developing world (BBC News, 2003)
- 6: Kilometers the average African or Asian woman walks to collect and carry potable water home each day, typically in 20 liter jugs at 20.8 kgs (46 lbs) each when full, which in turn leads to severe health problems resulting from the heavy pressure on women’s backs, heads, and hips (Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council, 2004; Oxfam, 2005)
- 20: Number of liters used by Americans on average each time they flush a toilet, equal to what the average African uses each day for drinking, cooking, washing, and cleaning, half the amount recommended for basic needs by the World Health Organization (WHO) (BBC News, 2003; Water Partners International, 2005)
- 33.3: Percentage of global population (about 2.1 billion people) living in countries with moderate-to-high “water stress” (i.e., when water consumption exceeds 10% of renewable freshwater resources), with West Africa facing the severest threat with 90% of its population living under severe water stress (UN Environment Programme, 2005)
- 130: Minimum number of countries in which, working closely with the World Bank, the world’s largest water companies—predicted to control 65% to 75% of European and North American public waterworks within the next 15 years—now operate, raising fears that humankind is losing control of its most vital resource to a handful of private enterprises in disregard of the human rights ideal that water should be treated “as a social and cultural good and not primarily as an economic commodity” (The Center for Public Integrity, 2003; Public Citizen, 2005)

- 2,000:** Minimum liters of water needed to produce food sufficient for one person daily, a right that is threatened by inefficient agriculture and irrigation systems (currently consuming 70% of the water we use) which, combined with steadily increasing water scarcity (2/3 of the world's people already face serious shortages), threatens also the right to the highest attainable standard of health (BBC News, 2003; UN Economic and Social Council, 1998; WHO, 2003)
- 14,000:** Minimum number of people worldwide who die from waterborne diseases daily; 5,483 of them from diarrhea, with more children having died from diarrheal diseases in the last 10 years than all the people who lost their lives to armed conflict since WWII (Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security, 1999; WHO, 2002)
- 255,463:** Number of voters in Santa Fe, Argentina (99.7% of registered voters) who chose to rescind the city's contract with a transnational water supply company primarily because of concerns that privatizing water sources would lead, as elsewhere, to increased disparities between the rich and poor (who pay disproportionate percentages of their income for water) (AID/WATCH, 2002; Public Citizen, 2003)
- 19,500,000:** Number of people infected yearly with waterborne parasites such as roundworm and whipworm; the highest number of them school-age children who, as a result, are kept from school, suffer aggravated malnutrition, and risk retarded physical development (WHO/UNICEF, 2002)
- 1,100,000,000:** Number of people who lack adequate access to safe water (i.e., 20 liters per person per day from a water source within 1 kilometer of home, according to the WHO), threatening their right to health because of the heightened risk of such diseases as cholera, dysentery, hepatitis, malaria, schistosomiasis, and diarrhea, which combine to cause 3.4 million deaths annually (Third World Network, 2002; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004)
- 23,000,000,000:** US dollars required annually to bring safe water and sanitation to all persons worldwide who lack it now (\$30 billion annually by 2015), in contrast to the \$8 billion currently invested each year by the developed nations to this end—the \$15 billion shortfall being equal to the amount Americans and Europeans spend on pet food each year (Global Development Research Center, 1999)

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