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Water – a source of conflict

Report¹

Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs

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Summary

Water is part of humankind's common heritage and a vital resource for human survival. However, it is also a limited, fragile resource, and one in six of the world's inhabitants still does not have access to water.

There are increasingly close links between water and security, to the point where water is becoming a military and political tool and a new weapon for terrorists, leading to acts of violence and conflicts which may threaten a state's political and social stability.

Governments must recognise that access to water is a fundamental human right and the rules of international water law should be revised.

States should also set up programmes of assistance and co-operation with countries which suffer from water shortages.

1. 2011 - Second part-session



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A. Draft resolution²

1. Water is essential for human survival, but a billion people in the world do not have access to drinking water.
2. In this context, the Parliamentary Assembly would point out that the target set at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 was to reduce by half the number of people without access to drinking water by 2015.
3. The Assembly would also refer to its [Resolution 1693 \(2009\)](#) on water: a strategic challenge for the Mediterranean Basin, and to the proposals made by the parliaments at the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul on 19 March 2009, where emphasis was placed, in particular, on the role of parliamentarians in drawing up rules concerning water management, water supply, generalisation of the principle of the right to water and the implementation of water policies.
4. The Assembly regrets, however, that in their statement of 22 March 2009, the governments failed to acknowledge that the right to water and sanitation is a human right.
5. The Assembly would also like to refer to its [Recommendation 1885 \(2009\)](#) on drafting an additional Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a healthy environment.
6. The Assembly points out that on 28 July 2010, the United Nations recognised access to water and sanitation as a fundamental human right and that, on 30 September 2010, the Human Rights Council affirmed in turn that “the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human dignity”.
7. Unfortunately, population growth, the contrasting but increasing needs of the developing countries and the industrialised countries, as well as climatic vagaries, exacerbate the crucial nature of water, making it a political issue which often gives rise to conflict situations.
8. The Assembly would point out that globalisation is undoubtedly one of the major contributing factors to the depletion of fresh water and drinking water, the others being irrigation, wastage and pollution.
9. This makes it essential to take measures to reduce the obsolescence of supply networks and manage irrigation systems more effectively.
10. Bearing in mind that fresh water is a limited, fragile resource, but one which is vital for humankind, the Assembly notes and regrets the fact that one in six of the world’s inhabitants still does not have access to water and that almost one person in two has to live without a waste-water drainage system.
11. Climate change also compounds the problem of malnutrition in the world’s most arid regions, giving rise to millions of climate refugees.
12. In this connection, the Assembly would draw attention to the fact that water shortages lead to acts of violence and conflicts which may threaten a state’s political and social stability. Examples of this are seen in events in the Middle East, the Caucasus and China, which confirm the close links between water and security.
13. The Assembly has to conclude that water has become a military and political tool and a new weapon for terrorists.
14. The Assembly therefore recommends that the authorities of the member and non-member states:
 - 14.1. recognise that access to water is a fundamental human right (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/292 of 28 July 2010 and United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 15/9 of 30 September 2010);
 - 14.2. apply and, if necessary, revise the rules of international water law;
 - 14.3. review the systems for the joint management of transfrontier rivers and aquifers;
 - 14.4. take the necessary measures to organise river basins;
 - 14.5. develop international waterways;
 - 14.6. improve transparency and the flow of information between all stakeholders;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 25 February 2011.

- 14.7. ensure that the activities pursued in their countries do not damage the natural resources in other countries;
 - 14.8. apply to the International Court of Justice for peaceful settlement of disputes on resource sharing among several states;
 - 14.9. promote fairer water charges and provide distribution services of drinking water of good quality and in sufficient quantities as well as acceptable, accessible and affordable sanitation services, as recommended in the Human Rights Council's Resolution 15/9;
 - 14.10. provide all citizens with means of calling their government to account and demanding compensation arrangements, where appropriate;
 - 14.11. set up a programme of assistance and co-operation with countries which suffer from water shortages;
 - 14.12. take measures to control the use of groundwater to promote savings and avoid waste;
 - 14.13. introduce measures for the desalinisation of water to transform sea water cheaply into drinking water;
 - 14.14. review agricultural practices and policies to ensure that they are viable, by encouraging investments in efficient irrigation systems and fostering technology transfers in this field between developed and developing countries;
 - 14.15. set up strict monitoring of the risks of accidental pollution;
 - 14.16. establish a data base containing meteorological, hydrological and socio-economic information.
15. The Assembly also recommends that local and regional authorities ensure that their citizens are provided with a good quality water treatment system.
16. The Assembly encourages parliaments and all other interested parties to take part in the 'Helpdesk' initiative, as recommended by the 5th World Water Forum held in Istanbul in 2009.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Marquet, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Water is not only part of humankind's common heritage and a vital resource for human survival, it is also essential for the main sectors of economic activity (agriculture, manufacturing, energy production and passenger and goods transport). While three quarters of the earth's surface are covered by oceans and seas, fresh water represents only 2.5% of this volume. The bulk is concentrated in icebergs and therefore as such unexploitable.
2. It is estimated that of all the water abstracted in the world, 10% is destined for domestic consumption, 20% for industry and 70% for agriculture. Water resources also help to maintain the balance of ecosystems. According to United Nations figures, a billion people do not have access to drinking water, 2.6 billion do not have access to basic sanitation and 2.2 million die every year of diseases linked to lack of access to water or because of poor water quality. Availability of fresh water per head of population has dropped dramatically from some 17 000 cubic metres per year in the mid-20th century to some 6 000 cubic metres per year today.
3. The final report of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit set a target for 2015 of reducing by half "the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water ... and the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation".
4. Population growth, the contrasting but increasing needs of the developing and industrialised countries and climatic vagaries, whether recurrent drought and chronic shortages or devastating floods, exacerbate the crucial nature of water which thus becomes a major economic stake and a national or international political issue conducive to situations of conflict between states.
5. Tensions between countries which share a river basin may, for instance, jeopardise sustainable development and heighten poverty, foster migratory movements and social instability and cause conflicts, whereas in fact the mutual need to pool water resources should help to forge peaceful co-operation between different communities.

2. Climate change

6. Global warming has obvious effects on water, such as variable precipitation, flooding, periods of drought, glacier melt and rising sea levels.
7. Scientists estimate that a one-degree increase in the average temperature will lead to a 1% rise in precipitation, as warm air absorbs more humidity. The total volume of water in the world would not change, but the water cycle would be speeded up, affecting most of the world's agriculture, which depends on the amount of precipitation and the season in which it falls.
8. In recent years, world temperatures have risen by an average of 0.74°C. The increase has been more pronounced in northern latitudes. It has resulted, among other things, in a decrease in the surface area of the polar ice cap and of snow and ice cover on mountains in both hemispheres and a significant increase in precipitation on the eastern side of North and South America, in northern Europe and in north and central Asia.
9. These developments also have important repercussions on agriculture and forest management and have led to the emergence of new diseases resulting from the presence of allergens in the environment. They also mean that certain animal species are threatened with extinction.
10. However, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasises that it is very difficult to attribute these changes to a natural change in the climate. Albeit cautiously, the IPCC establishes a clear link between global warming and human activity.
11. Greenhouse gas emissions are the main signs of industrial growth. The IPCC says that they increased by 70% between 1970 and 2004 and if nothing is done to curb it, the increase will pass from 25% to 90% between 2000 and 2030. According to some theories, temperatures could rise by 0.2°C over the next twenty years.
12. Climate change not only brings droughts and flooding but is also indirectly responsible for changes affecting the flow rate of watercourses and has an important impact on increases in concentrations of pollutants and toxins in the water and water stress. For example, the surface area of Lake Chad has decreased from 25 000 square kilometres to 3 000 square kilometres as it has lost some 90% of its water

under the combined influence of climate change, the construction of dams and demographic pressures. The drying up of this lake, on which 30 million people depend for their survival, gives rise to fears of conflicts over resources between the various parties affected or even between states.

13. By altering the migratory movements of populations threatened by environmental disaster and making access to drinking water even more difficult in certain regions, climate change may aggravate strained international relations and become the source of numerous conflicts or indeed wars.

3. Water, poverty and migration

14. Wealth is unevenly distributed throughout the world. The mere fact of living in a particular part of the world can mean a perpetual struggle for water, food and housing.

15. Water resources are vital for mankind but also for economic development and the preservation of ecosystems. Alas, it is observed that billions of human beings lack water and sanitary facilities, generally because of poor management of resources and insufficient investment, so much so that people do not live as long in good health in the southern countries.

16. Climate change also compounds the problem of malnutrition in the world's most arid regions, giving rise to millions of climate refugees and undermining the development of the countries concerned. Desertification is progressing and threatening the livelihoods of about a billion people throughout the world. According to the figures of the United Nations Convention on Desertification and Drought (UNCDD),³ some 12 million hectares of arable land (or the equivalent of the surface area of Benin), providing enough food for 6 million people, are lost every year to soil erosion and desertification. This problem now affects some 25% of the earth's land surface, 40% of the world population and 50% of its livestock. In 2010, over 8 million people developed chronic malnutrition as a result of a drought in Niger. The convention also points to the fact that "with the existing climate change scenario, almost half the world's population will be living in areas of high water stress by 2030".

17. Environmental damage also drives tourists away, resulting in a considerable drop in income for poor countries.

18. In this way, poverty and environmental deterioration have become trapped in a vicious circle. Environmental problems fuel poverty and the lack of any alternative forces poor people to take what they need to survive from nature, often through illegal activities such as poaching. Growing tensions that put pressure on environmental resources cause conflicts from which poor people are the first to suffer.

19. Most often, environmental migrants are clustered in very small, unsuitable areas. In some cases, the meagre resources available to them rapidly run out and this only serves to make their situation worse.

20. For example, in the isolated regions of Ethiopia's fertile highlands, there is a camp along a dried-up river bed just outside the old Muslim city of Harar inhabited by some 5 000 Somalis of different ethnic backgrounds who were forced to leave the region of Ogaden because of internal conflicts over water.

21. Very often women and children are attacked when they go to fetch water or take their livestock to drink at springs or water holes, forcing them to abandon their homes and take refuge in churches or schools.

4. Water – a new battleground

22. The last water war was fought 4 500 years ago in Mesopotamia. In modern times, internal conflicts continue to develop as water supplies reach their usable limits. According to some experts, more than 50 countries on five continents will soon be involved in conflicts over water unless decisions are taken promptly about sharing arrangements for international rivers.

23. Very often two causes lie behind these conflicts. The first is a rapid or major change in the physical environment of a river basin (through the construction of a dam or the diversion of a river) or its political context (through the breaking up of nations) and the second, poor management by existing institutions, particularly where there is no treaty establishing each nation's responsibilities and rights.

3. In August 2010, the United Nations launched its Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020).

24. Yet if the right measures are taken, a dam can contribute to development, notably by regulating the water supply, limiting flooding, improving navigation and, in particular, producing electricity. According to the World Commission on Dams, there are currently some 45 000 dams in the world. In ten years, hydroelectric power generation, which does not emit any greenhouse gases or produce any toxic waste, has increased by some 20%. There are, however, three impediments to the growth of this energy source: dams are accused of disturbing ecological balances upstream and downstream, causing large-scale population movements and preventing the breeding of certain fish species. At international level, treating water as a renewable energy source does not fail to raise certain problems.

25. According to United Nations figures, there are 263 international water basins (rivers, lakes or groundwater) shared by two countries or more. These basins account for 60% of world water reserves and 40% of the world population live nearby. Where there are water shortages, upstream installations on an international watercourse can have an impact on water quality or availability for neighbouring states, which may ultimately be a source of tension and conflict.

26. According to some experts, the danger lies less in water shortages themselves than in the temptation for countries to try to control international watercourses. Turkey, for example, is financing the South-Eastern Anatolia Project (or GAP), which involves the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric plants on the Tigris and the Euphrates, which supplied about 22% of Turkish electricity in 2010. The construction of these dams enables Turkey to control the flow of water downstream towards Syria and Iraq, increasing these countries' dependence on Turkish water sources. Relations between Turkey on the one hand and Syria and Iraq on the other have deteriorated considerably since the launch of the project. In the ecological sphere, scientists have detected a pronounced salinisation of the land downstream, which will cause major changes to the region's ecosystem.

27. Water shortage undoubtedly leads to acts of violence and conflicts which may threaten a state's political and social stability. The civil conflicts of today go beyond borders and are behind tomorrow's international wars.

28. Wrangling between states over water gives rise to regional tensions, impedes economic development and runs the risk of causing more major conflicts.

29. It should be recalled that the International Court of Justice has an important role to play, although it cannot impose decisions on parties which have not sought its arbitration. It is suitably equipped to work towards the settlement of global disputes, according to well-defined criteria of interpretation (Article 38 of its statute).

30. It has to be stressed that experts on international security have often ignored or underestimated the real and complex link between water and security.

31. At the end of the 1980s, the Pacific Institute set up a scheme to record and collate events relating to water and conflicts.

32. Recent events in the Middle East, the Balkans, East Timor and other parts of the world have added new data, as can be seen below.

33. In this way, water has become a military and political tool, but unfortunately also a weapon for terrorists.

34. Whereas international security and international and regional policies are always changing, there is one constant, namely that water is essential to life, and the measures introduced to meet water needs and demand depend most of the time on political decision making.

35. Internal water stress also has an influence on international political alliances, which merely exacerbate the burden of humanitarian crises. Countries normally adapt to water stress by importing the bulk of their food, enabling them to allocate a larger share of their drinking water to cities and industry.

36. According to the experts, over the next fifteen years, more and more people will be living in countries experiencing water stress, and more and more countries will be forced to swell the ranks of food importers, resulting in an increase in wheat prices and, in poor countries, major famine and an increased need for humanitarian aid.

37. Although full privatisation, in other words complete divestiture (including the transfer of assets) is the exception rather than the norm, privatisation of the water supply can also result in increased costs and a reduction in subsidies. In Bolivia, for example, following the privatisation of the water supply system in Cochahamba, water costs reached unprecedented heights, with water bills for certain residents amounting to a quarter or more of their income, causing community violence.

38. The water industry is now the third largest in the world after oil and electricity, but its vital role and its scarcity will soon make it the main potential source of profit.

39. In the United Nations General Assembly, Venezuela has condemned the privatisation of water as a factor of conflict. Development of the private sector allegedly carries a risk of community confrontations. Commercialisation of an asset such as water in fact presents the danger that economic interests may continue to take precedence over environmental issues. The intensity of the debate between advocates and critics of private sector involvement has perhaps obscured the success of this form of management. Reports by the World Bank (the Gassner report) and the OECD have highlighted productivity gains and improvements to household water supply and sanitation connections. Nevertheless, if certain states decide to rely on multinational corporations to manage their water resources, it is up to governments to award private enterprise limited leases (fixed-term, for example), in addition to a stringent regulatory framework and mechanisms of complaint and accountability. The independent expert's report to the Human Rights Council (29 June 2010) thus points out that "states have a duty to regulate and monitor providers that they involve in service delivery ... When the state does not directly provide services, its role nevertheless remains obligatory and critical".

40. Participation by the private sector must be regulated. The 2008 report to the Human Rights Council includes a description of a strategic framework founded on three principles: the duty of states to protect people from human rights abuses by third parties, the responsibility of companies to respect human rights, and the need for access to effective remedies and grievance mechanisms to address alleged human rights violations.

41. In the United States, the former Republican administration refused to ban the harmful chemical, atrazine, now prohibited in Europe, which is found among other substances in tap water. Nestlé and other bottled water producers are engaged in frantic competition to corner this increasingly lucrative market even if it means ravaging springs and rivers.

5. The various causes of lack of and growing demand for water

42. The internationalisation of finance and trade has repercussions on world trends, including the demand for and the consumption of natural resources. Globalisation has caused an increase in demand for water due in particular to the expansion and acceleration of industrialisation.

43. This is compounded by the problem of limited water stocks. Although overall water stocks are currently sufficient to meet demand, consumption is increasing, meaning that shortages will be felt in the next few years. There are three main reasons for the dwindling of fresh water resources: irrigation, wastage and pollution.

44. Irrigation is a major problem, since this practice represents nearly 70% of world supplies of renewable water. Irrigation directly affects the employment of hundreds of millions of farmers for whom the harvest is the chief source of income. It is therefore necessary to invest in more efficient irrigation systems; many of them, such as gravity sprinkle irrigation or drip systems, have proved effective for controlling the watering of fields. Developing countries form the majority of the agricultural countries, so technology transfers should be supported and fostered. For example, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia lie below the water shortage threshold set by the United Nations. The agricultural sector accounts for about 80% of water use in the Maghreb and half of this is lost to evaporation from reservoirs and supply ditches or inefficient irrigation techniques. Another important consideration is crop choice. Many people consider Morocco's decision to opt for export-based forms of agriculture with high energy consumptions, such as tomato growing, to be ecologically unsound given that there are many other types of crop that require less water.

45. To combat wastage of water resources, it is necessary to modernise the supply systems, particularly in the developing countries where infrastructures are often outdated. In the rich countries, growing urbanisation and the use of appliances with a high water consumption, such as dishwashers, result in a rapid reduction in the quantity of water available.

46. Pollution is a consequence of this growing urbanisation and of industrialisation, particularly owing to factory and transport effluent and emissions. These increase the level of toxic substances in running water. Mismanagement of irrigation can also cause seepage of chemicals (pesticides, nitrates, etc.) into the ground, and salinisation of soils.

47. Furthermore, the world population should reach about 9.3 billion by 2050 and all of these people will need food, housing, clothing and energy. Unfortunately, several of the countries with very high population growth rates are located in areas where there is not enough water. Water shortages have already made themselves felt in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Many states thus have less than 1 700 m³/inhabitant/year of fresh water and are therefore in a situation of water stress. Some 20 states are below the threshold of 1 000 m³/inhabitant/year and therefore in a situation of shortage (particularly in Africa and the Middle East). This may result in increased competition in future years, eventually leading to conflicts.

48. These quarrels often break out in poor, divided countries with only one or two sources of wealth. In these countries, whoever controls the water supply is likely to become very rich whereas all the other inhabitants are destined to live in poverty. In developed countries, water resources are controlled by the government and distributed fairly among the inhabitants. In developing countries, interest groups or gang leaders fight over these sources of wealth. Tensions are seen to be encouraged where water management problems are compounded by ethnic and/or religious differences, causing intercommunity confrontations.

6. A few prominent examples

6.1. The Middle East

49. In the age of rockets and long-range missiles, Israel's desire to continue to occupy the Syrian territory of the Golan Heights to the east of Lake Tiberias, which it has held since the Six-Day War of 1967, does not and never did have much to do with any military strategy of protection or dissuasion. The real goal is quite simply to secure control over a huge reservoir of water covering some 1 150 square kilometres, which, according to United Nations figures, provides about 500 million cubic metres per year, much of which is said to be piped into the Negev Desert. About 70% of the water which flows into the lake is pumped out and routed to Israel. The occupation of the Golan Heights also has the effect of keeping the Syrian border away from the lake shores and hence the water. This reserve is vital for the region and, directly or indirectly, the Israelis, the Palestinians and the Jordanians all tap into it.

50. Thus, it often happens that behind such confrontations, there are significant yet largely overlooked small-scale conflicts for the control of a resource on which agricultural development and thus all life in the region depends.

51. The Oslo Accords of 1995 failed to resolve the question of water distribution in times of peace, despite the fact that, along with the Lebanon, four countries – Israel, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinian Territories – depend on the Jordan River Basin.

52. The sharing of the waters of the Jordan and its tributaries provides a background, a pretext and an explanation for many confrontations, particularly as regards settlement in the occupied territories, whereas Article 12 of the Oslo Accords stipulated that questions of water, like those of noise, sanitation and the protection of flora, fauna and migratory species, should be settled outside the sphere of political debate and conflict.

53. Clearly, this kind of conflict would not occur if the region had plenty of water and the rains were not so irregular. Fears linked with water resources are such that the Israelis regularly accuse the Palestinians of poisoning or plugging springs. Conversely, the Palestinian Authority sometimes claims that Israel occupied southern Lebanon for so many years because it wished to construct an underground diversion of the coastal River Litani, which rises in the Lebanese Bekaa plain but abruptly changes direction towards the west and the sea a few kilometres short of Israel's northern border. It also accuses Israel of covertly pumping water here, there and everywhere.

54. These are outright water wars, which are hard fought and vital for the local communities.

55. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has drawn public attention to the critical situation as regards access to water for the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, where a large part of the population does not have direct access to drinking water and has to rely on water bought from private suppliers.

56. According to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as a result of the Israeli military assault organised under the code name Operation Cast Lead, 150 000 inhabitants of Gaza are still affected by insufficient water supply, 50 000 have no water at all while the others receive water only once every five or six days.

57. Gaza municipality has been forced to pump tonnes of sewage directly into the sea to avoid contaminating groundwater and drinking water.

6.2. The Caucasus

58. The largest river of the Caucasus is the Aras. It flows along the borders of Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran into the Kura River. It is thus a source of drinking water for a large number of states, but it is polluted by millions of tonnes of sewage and industrial waste. Furthermore, it is predicted that within ten years there will be severe water shortages in this region. These tensions over water are further aggravated by the poor relations arising from other conflicts in the region.

6.3. China

59. In 2000, thousands of Chinese farmers defied the police over a government plan to recover the run-off from a local reservoir to supply cities and industry and for other purposes. For a long time the farmers had been using the water from the Yellow River and a drought had made water supply an even more critical issue than usual.

60. Disputes have arisen in the provinces around the downstream section of the river basin, where there is practically no more water. The lower course of the Yellow River has experienced periods of total drought, which have been getting longer and longer for some years.

61. The Salween River flows from southern China through Myanmar (Burma) into Thailand. Each of these nations is planning dam construction and development projects along the river, none of which are compatible. Furthermore, China has shown little interest in water sharing. It was one of only three countries to vote against a 1997 United Nations Convention establishing guidelines and principles on the use of international rivers.

7. Promoting a responsible approach in order to preserve peace

62. Whereas the world population has more than tripled since the beginning of the 20th century, water use has increased six fold. In the next fifty years, the world population will have increased by another 40% to 50%. This population growth, combined with industrialisation and urbanisation, will result in vastly increased water needs, which will have many effects on the environment.

63. The situation is made all the more dramatic by the fact that the rise in water consumption for human needs not only causes a reduction in the water available for industrial and agricultural development but also poses a major threat to aquatic ecosystems and species. As a result, ecosystems are no longer able to preserve environmental balance.

64. The question that arises then is whether there is enough water to prevent water shortages from being added to all the other reasons for making war.

65. Fresh water is a limited, fragile resource but one which is vital for humankind. However, one in six of the world's inhabitants still does not have access to water, while nearly one person in two has to live without a waste-water drainage system.

66. Global warming will increase evaporation and seriously reduce precipitation by up to 20% in the Middle East and North Africa, and the ration of water available per person will almost certainly have decreased by half in these regions by mid-century.

67. A total of 260 river basins shared by two or more countries have been catalogued. In the absence of agreements or treaties between these countries, it is likely that cross-border conflicts will come about. Major projects which are not combined with regional co-operation programmes can cause conflicts.

68. Because of the pressure on the Aral Sea, its surface area has halved and two thirds of its water volume has been lost; 36 000 square kilometres of the former seabed are now salt flats.

69. This rapid depletion of a resource that is essential to human life will cause tensions and exacerbate conflicts throughout the world, fuelling a vicious circle. For example, in developing countries it is to be feared that the depletion of “white gold” may cause deterioration of farming conditions and lowering of small farmers’ living standards. This may prompt them to leave their home regions for the towns, where the public authorities cannot afford to construct the necessary infrastructure. Discontent may result, and hence recourse to violence as an outlet for the despair of these displaced populations. The role of water shortage in the degradation of the social fabric is therefore not to be overlooked.

70. Consequently, there is now an urgent need to take measures to make sure that states have sufficient quantities of water available to them and ensure that this water has all the requisite healthful and hygienic qualities.

71. On 28 July 2010, the United Nations declared access to water and sanitation for meeting basic human needs to be a fundamental human right (at Bolivia’s instigation) (Resolution A/RES/64/292). On 30 September 2010, the Human Rights Council declared in turn that “the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human dignity” (A/HRC/RES/15/9). It reaffirmed that “states have the primary responsibility to ensure the full realisation of all human rights”. Accordingly, the state must ensure that water is provided free of charge, or at least at a price that their most disadvantaged citizens can afford. By contrast, the supply of water as a luxury good to fill swimming pools or wash cars should be considered a private economic commodity, and made available in accordance with market laws.

72. Proper management of water resources should be viewed as a factor that is conducive to peace and which is essential to avoid lack of this vital resource becoming a geostrategic issue capable of provoking armed conflicts. In this respect, the role of local and regional authorities is primordial and decision makers must strive to invest in, and ensure that the population is provided with, a good quality water treatment system.

73. Although reliable information is often difficult to obtain, a data base containing meteorological, hydrological and socio-economic information is still the best means of achieving effective long-term management. Tensions between states can arise when data are not properly shared or are misused to block development plans. Disparities in the capacity to process and share data may also hinder co-operation.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

74. Clearly, plans need to be made for the intelligent future management of water resources, bearing in mind that water has always created ties between people and brought them together. However, this depends largely on the goodwill of governments.

75. In the light of the above considerations, it would appear to be a matter of urgent necessity for states to recognise that access to water is a fundamental human right.