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# Water as a Human Right



By Marta Litter

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On July 28, 2010, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly established **access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right**, a concept adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2014. Except for a few specialists, it is outstanding that the majority of the world’s population ignores this categorization that, in addition, is essential for the realization of all other human rights such as health, food, housing, work, culture, among others.

Contaminated water and poor sanitation transmit serious diseases such as cholera, dysentery, hepatitis A, typhus, poliomyelitis, arsenicosis (regional endemic chronic hydroarsenicism, HACRE), among others. Pollution and toxic substances cause at least nine million premature deaths, twice as many as the COVID-19 pandemic in its first months, three times the combined deaths from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and 15 times more than those caused by wars, killings and other forms of violence. In Latin America, 150,000 deaths occur annually from water diseases, 85% of them in children below five years.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, approved by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, established 17 sustainable development goals (SDG), of which SDG 6 establishes ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Water must be **sufficient, healthy, acceptable, culturally appropriate, accessible**, and **affordable** for everybody. By 2025, SDG 6 is far from being achieved.

According to the UN, states must **respect, protect** and **fulfil obligations** with respect to the human right to access to water through laws, strategies and action plans. They must prevent third parties from interfering, avoiding disconnection or impediment to supply, prevent companies from damaging water quality through contamination, and facilitate access to and provide water when individuals cannot dispose of it by their own means. They must also promote education for the sustainable use of water. However, in addition to governments, other actors must be involved in these purposes: companies, civil societies and citizens in general.

Unfortunately, five years after the adoption of the SDGs, the targets of SDG 6 are still not on track. In particular, Argentina’s government has rejected the 2030 Agenda, weakening the country’s capacity for the effective management of its water resources. In 2024, 9.3% of Argentine households did not have access to drinking water and 25.2% did not have access to sewers. Adverse outcomes fall disproportionately on the country’s most vulnerable groups. This rejection endangers wildlife and habitats, and weakens the country’s ability to effectively manage its water resources, diminishing the possibilities for agriculture, energy production and health. The adverse results fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable groups (e.g., children, women, ethnic minorities such as native people).

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