

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation**

REFERENCE: UA  
SYR 1/2015:

29 July 2015

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 24/6 and 24/18.

We would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government to a previous communication on water cut-offs in Aleppo sent on 14 May 2014 (SYR 6/2014) and your Government's reply received on 28 May 2014. In this connection, we have received related information concerning the **alleged disconnection of piped water access to the city of Aleppo in the context of the ongoing armed conflict resulting in a lack of adequate access to safe water and sanitation in homes, hospitals and health facilities, and in increased illness.**

According to the information received:

As of approximately 29 July 2015, the city of Aleppo has been almost entirely deprived of access to piped water throughout the present month. Reports suggest that the restoration of water supplies has been very intermittent and sporadic, and restoring water to neighbourhoods of Sulaymaniyah and Aziziya, for instance, occurred for mere hours before being cut off again. Other neighbourhoods, in particular those located at higher altitudes, have not received any service restoration whatsoever for several weeks. As a result, many citizens have taken to drawing unsafe water from wells or from the Quwaiq River.

In some cases, these disconnections have allegedly been performed deliberately by armed forces, known as involved in the ongoing armed conflict. It is also alleged that since the attack on the Scientific Research Center in the western

outskirts of Aleppo city on 4 July 2015, air strikes and other defensive attacks performed both by the armed groups and the Government's forces have intensified and caused the destruction of essential materials to the water supply system, for example the electric power lines and related infrastructure required to operate the water distribution station in Suleiman al-Halabi district.

Considering the summer heat wave that this region is currently experiencing, many thousands of people are experiencing thirst and dehydration that is increasing their vulnerability to disease. It is alleged that 41 percent of children (about 3,000) who have visited UNICEF-supported medical centres since the beginning of July 2015 have reported cases of moderate diarrhoea. It is probable that this particularly high rate of child cases of diarrhoea is related to the lack of access to safe drinking water.

We are extremely concerned that large parts of the population have been, and continue to be deprived of access to safe water, which is not only a fundamental right but also essential to support life and health. While your Government informed us, as of 28 May 2014, that it denies deliberate cut-off of your citizens' access to water, we wish to remind your Government that the deliberate targeting of the civilian population to deprive it of essential supplies such as water is a matter of very serious concern, and a breach of both international humanitarian law and human rights law.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, the human right to safe water is one of the most essential human rights, as set forth in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN General Assembly resolution 64/292 of 2010. Article 11 of the ICESCR consecrates the right to an adequate standard of living and article 12 of the ICESCR provides for the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its General Comments 14 and 15 establishes water as an underlying determinant of health and as a human right, derived from the right to an adequate standard of living.

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org) or can be provided upon request.

In view of the urgency of the matter, we would appreciate a response on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the basic rights of civilians to access safe water and sanitation in compliance with international instruments.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Are the facts summarized above accurate?

2. What actions, if any, are being taken to ensure that water distribution is re-established for the entire population of Aleppo and that there will be a continuous and sufficient supply of clean and safe drinking water for its citizens?
3. What steps are being taken to prevent the recurrence of a similar situation in Aleppo and other cities?
4. What steps are being taken to combat increased illness including the increased rates of child cases of diarrhoea?

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations.

Your Excellency's Government's response will be made available in a report to be presented to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Dainius Puras

Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Léo Heller

Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation