

EU and India hold a Human Rights Council side event on the importance of access to safe drinking water and sanitation for the realisation of gender equality

PRESS RELEASE

The Permanent Mission of India and the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva co-organised on Friday, 24 June 2022 a hybrid side event during the ongoing 50th regular session of the Human Rights Council on 'Realising gender equality in the realisation of the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation'. The side event, which was held at the premises of the EU Delegation, received cross-regional support from the Permanent Missions of Germany, Spain, Bolivia, Mexico, Gabon, Namibia, The Gambia, Republic of Korea, Fiji, and UAE and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Twelve years ago, the UN General Assembly explicitly recognised “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right”, acknowledging that clean drinking water and sanitation were essential to the realisation of all human rights. “The EU supports the universal access to safe, sufficient, and affordable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, and the human rights dimension in those areas,” said H.E. Ambassador Lotte Knudsen, the Head of the Delegation of the European Union. “This support comes in both political and financial forms. The EU and its Member States are the world’s largest Official Development Aid donor. We apply a human rights-based approach to ensure outcomes are inclusive, just, and sustainable. Over the last decade, the EU has invested more than €2.5 billion in water and sanitation.”

“The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are the two most crucial economic, social and cultural rights,” said H.E. Ambassador Indra Mani Pandey, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva. “These are enabling rights that make the enjoyment of other human rights possible. For example, enjoyment of the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to adequate food, the right to adequate housing and the right to education is highly dependent on fulfilment of right to safe drinking water and right to sanitation. They are of even greater relevance for the realisation of gender equality. There is no doubt that

the lack of access to drinking water and sanitation has a caused disproportionately huge adverse impact on the lives of women and girls, in particular their health, mobility and safety.”

The panel discussions were moderated by the focal point on the human rights to water and sanitation, Mr. Rio Hada, from the OHCHR, Development and Economic and Social Issues Branch. Panellists spoke on the importance of access to safe drinking water and sanitation for the realisation of gender equality and included:

- Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak of the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, India
- Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation
- Ms. Reem Alsalem, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and its causes and consequences
- Ms. Kelly Ann Naylor, UNICEF, Director WASH & CEED and UN-Water, Vice-Chair
- Mr Federico Properzi, UN-WATER, Chief Technical Adviser

The side event brought together a wide range of participants, including civil society organisations' and States' representatives, who drew attention to the challenges faced in the realisation of the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as well as good practices from their respective regions. The urgent need for States to fast-track progress under Sustainable Development Goal 6 for furthering the human rights of women and girls was emphasised.
