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United Nations Security Council Arria Formula Meeting

Protection of Civilians:

Achieving a better protection of water-related essential services and infrastructure for the civilian population during armed conflicts

22 March 2023, 3:00-6:00pm
Trusteeship Council Chamber, UN Headquarters

On World Water Day 2023, Mozambique and Switzerland will convene a ministerial-level Arria-formula meeting. The main objective is to raise awareness on the importance of the protection of critical infrastructure that enables the delivery of essential water and sanitation services during armed conflicts to the civilian population.

Objectives

The meeting will take stock and reflect on good practices shared by member states in relation to the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021), among others, relevant to the protection and provision of water-related essential services and infrastructure.

It will focus on essential water-related infrastructure and services, while acknowledging that basic infrastructures and essential services, such as healthcare, water, sanitation, energy, are often interdependent. It will draw attention to the humanitarian impacts resulting from disrupted essential water services, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups, including children.

Furthermore, the event will recall the importance of respecting and implementing international humanitarian law (IHL) in this regard, including as a condition for the continuation of service delivery and effective post-conflict recovery and resilience-building. The humanitarian situation is often compounded by economic crises, but also increasingly by frequent and severe weather events and natural disasters (UNSC Resolution 2573 PP16), such as floods, cyclones or drought. Therefore, this meeting will also aim at providing a better understanding of how dealing with the adverse effects of climate change, as a compounding factor, can inform effective measures for the protection of water services and infrastructures in contexts of armed conflicts, and how they should be taken into consideration in prevention and recovery measures.

Background

In 2022, over 270 million people were directly in need of humanitarian assistance. Essential water and sanitation services and their infrastructure, including personnel, hardware, and consumables, are crucial for the survival of the civilian population, particularly in armed conflicts. In addition, water, sanitation and the associated delivery infrastructures are critical to economic development and the recovery of livelihoods.

UNSC Resolutions 2417 and 2573 are both critical contributions for a better protection of essential water services and water infrastructure. While resolution 2417 further qualifies drinking water installations and supplies, as well as irrigation works, as objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, resolution 2573 focuses on the devastating impacts of ongoing armed conflicts on the delivery of essential services, including water and sanitation.

The indirect and longer-term impacts of widespread damage to basic infrastructures and disruption of essential services often reverberate long after a conflict has ended. Recent figures show that more civilians are dying from secondary effects than from the direct impact of hostilities. For example, in countries experiencing protracted armed conflicts, children under five years old are twenty times more likely to die from diarrheal disease linked to unsafe water and sanitation than from violence in conflicts.¹

¹ [UNICEF Water Under Fire, Vol.3: Attacks on water and sanitation services in armed conflict and the impacts on children, 2021](#)

Urban contexts are particularly affected, given the devastating effects of wars in cities, especially from the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area. But rural areas are not spared either, as infrastructure for food- and agro-ecological systems can be severely affected by the direct and indirect impacts of armed conflict.² Effects of armed conflict on the delivery and access to water supply have both imminent and potentially long-term effects on civilian lives and livelihoods. For example, protecting access to essential services and investment in preventive measures aimed at ensuring continuity in essential water service delivery is imperative to limit and mitigate risks for public health emergencies. Sub-optimal water, sanitation and hygiene standards can lead to, or exacerbate ongoing infectious disease outbreaks, such as cholera. Water system disruptions can hinder the adherence to infection prevention and control measures in healthcare settings putting both patients and healthcare workers at risk. In addition, it can be a driver of or aggravate displacement. Women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups face particularly disastrous consequences (health, malnutrition etc.) when safe water and sanitation are lacking.

Access to water and sanitation is a human right. In addition, in times of armed conflict, IHL provides crucial safeguards aimed at ensuring that essential services can continue to be provided. IHL prohibits attacks against objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, hence protecting water infrastructures. IHL also protects the natural environment, including water, by virtue of its civilian character. Measures need to be adopted to fully respect IHL. This includes the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, civilian infrastructure supporting essential services, as well as essential service provider personnel who operate, maintain and repair the infrastructure. This also applies to sites where service provider stocks are stored, such as warehouses. Parties have to facilitate the safe, rapid and unhindered delivery of these materials to ensure the provision of essential services during armed conflicts.

Respect of IHL and the protection of essential services delivery by parties to conflicts are necessary conditions for the continuation of service delivery, the effective delivery of water, sanitation, and hygiene programs or post-crisis recovery and will contribute to better public health, reduction of the risk of epidemics and spread of water-related diseases, particularly deadly to children.

Realities differ, given existing socio-economic fragilities and vulnerabilities; the humanitarian situation is often compounded by economic crises, but also increasingly by frequent and severe weather events and natural disasters, such as floods, cyclones or drought. A better understanding of the compounding effects of climate risks in contexts of armed conflicts is needed to inform effective measures for the protection of essential water services and water infrastructure in different fields. Prevention is key. At all times, including in the post-conflict recovery phase, the provision of safe water should rank among the highest priorities. Water, sanitation and the associated delivery infrastructures are critical to economic development, the recovery of livelihoods and peacebuilding efforts.

Guiding Questions

Participants are encouraged to base their interventions on the following questions:

- How can the Security Council further contribute to the implementation of relevant resolutions, including resolution 2573 (2021) and 2417 (2018) with regard to water-related services and infrastructure? How can the Security Council better employ its existing tools and mechanisms, play an enhanced role in preventing the disruption of essential water-related services and be more effective to improve the protection of water-related essential services and infrastructures?
- What are policy and practical measures to strengthen the capacity of states to fulfil their obligation to protect water-related services and infrastructure essential to the protection of the civilian population? What are concrete good practices and examples to ensure respect for and implementation of IHL by all parties to armed conflicts, including measures to be taken by member states, the UN, the Red Cross Movement and other actors.
- How can a better understanding of the adverse effects of climate change as a compounding factor, such as an increase in frequency and intensity of severe weather events and natural disasters (e.g. floods, storms/cyclones, drought), inform the protection of water services and infrastructures?

² Ibid.

Modalities

The Arria-formula meeting will be chaired by H.E. Carlos Alberto Fortes Mesquita, Minister of Public Works, Housing and Water Resources of Mozambique, and H.E. Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland. All UN Member States and Permanent Observers are invited to participate. Attendance at ministerial level is encouraged.

The following speakers are invited to brief:

- Deputy Executive Director of UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Hannan Sulieman
- Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Robert Mardini
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Filippo Grandi
- Civil Society representative (tbc)

The meeting will take place in the Trusteeship Council Chamber from 3pm to 6pm on 22 March 2023. The meeting may be broadcast on UN Web TV. Interpretation into the official languages of the UN will be provided (subject to confirmation).

To facilitate participation by as many delegations as possible, interventions should not exceed three minutes. To inscribe in the speakers' list and deliver a statement, please indicate the delegation as well as the name and title of the speaker via email to newyork.un.unsc@eda.admin.ch by **20 March 2023 at 6PM** with the subject line: "*POC/Water UNSC Arria meeting*".

Delegations are invited to send written versions of their statements by 30 March 2023 for inclusion in a compilation. UN Agencies, civil society and academic institutions are also invited to make submissions in writing.