



# A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

Report of the Global High-Level Panel  
on Water and Peace

## ABSTRACT



The Report of the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace is part of the Blue Peace initiative.

# Blue Peace



## TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR WATER AS A DRIVER OF PEACE

"The High-Level Panel on Water and Peace has concluded that the global water challenge is not only about development and human rights but it is also about peace and security. Therefore, it needs to be addressed urgently in an integrated and comprehensive way at all levels, ranging from the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral organisations to grass-root level institutions. It needs a response in terms of new thinking, new practices and new institutions in diplomacy, international law, data management, finance, security management, technology, climate change, pollution control among other spheres. The Panel has put forward several concrete recommendations in all these areas, because we believe that managing the global water challenge is not an ordinary task. It is a matter of survival."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danilo Türk".

**Dr Danilo Türk**  
Chairman  
Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace

With the support of:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC



**UNIVERSITÉ  
DE GENÈVE**

## **The Drama of Water**

The world is facing the drama of water. Around two billion people lack access to safe drinking water. Most of them live in fragile, often violent regions of the world. In contemporary armed conflicts, water resources and installations are being increasingly attacked and used as weapons of war. Moreover, water scarcity is exacerbated in a world with a growing population facing human-induced climate change. Despite these problems, humanity will have to find ways to produce 50 percent more food and double energy production by the middle of the century.

A fundamental rethinking of international water cooperation is essential, with the UN at the center of efforts for the necessary policy and institutional changes. The UN General Assembly should convene a full-fledged intergovernmental Global Conference on International Water Cooperation, with the aim of formulating a cooperation strategy and defining its specific priorities, and formulating an action plan for the five-year period following the Global Conference.

## **Into the Abyss: Water in Armed Conflicts**

The increasing tendency in a number of contemporary armed conflicts is to make water resources and infrastructure targets of attack or weapons of war, particularly in urban areas. These practices are flagrant violations of International Humanitarian Law and must be condemned. States have an obligation to respect and ensure respect for and compliance with International Humanitarian Law. The international community as a whole should assist humanitarian organizations since a permanent, long-term partnership between humanitarian organizations and local providers of services is of great importance for the effective protection or restoration of water infrastructure.

International efforts to maintain peace and security have to include effective policies for the protection of water infrastructure against all attacks, including terrorist attacks, while giving special priority to the humanitarian needs of affected civilian populations. The UN Security Council bears primary responsibility in this regard and should consider adopting, within its action for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a resolution on the protection of water resources and installations in all the situations on the Council's agenda.

## **An Ounce of Prevention: International Water Law and Transboundary Water Cooperation**

An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. International Water Law has developed a number of principles, norms and institutions that provide the basis of international water cooperation and result in greater stability and conflict prevention. The UN Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997 UN Watercourses Convention) and the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992 UNECE Water Convention) are the essential international instruments in this regard. The principle of equitable and reasonable utilization of watercourses and the obligation not to cause significant harm constitute the core around which appropriate international regimes can be developed. The right to safe drinking water and sanitation is recognized as a moral imperative of our time and as a human right.

However, in many areas of the world much still remains to be done to expand transboundary and regional water cooperation to the desired level. This need applies to river basins, including some traditionally-sensitive river basins, as well as to internationally shared aquifers. The latter need is critical as the existing level of international cooperation is still far from satisfactory: out of approximately 400 internationally shared aquifers there are only 5 where international agreements exist. Transboundary water agreements and institutions, as well as the relevant "soft law" instruments represent valuable tools that should be utilized more fully.

## **Quantity and Quality: Strengthening of the Knowledge-Based and Data-Driven Decision Making and Cooperation for Security and Peace Building**

Changes affecting water quantity such as droughts and floods – increasingly provoked by the effects of human-induced climate change – require intensified international cooperation and stronger institutions. At the same time, deteriorating water quality in many regions of the world, partly a result of the same causes, needs to be urgently addressed. Another problem exists in those internationally shared aquifers where the withdrawal of groundwater is greater than nature's ability to recharge the particular aquifer. Often the actual knowledge about the situations of aquifers is inadequate while the process of depletion continues. The technical, legal and policy instruments available to address these issues differ from region to region, and from country to country.

Therefore, monitoring and data sharing is an important task that should be prioritized at the global level. A strong, integrated global data and monitoring system needs to be developed on the basis of ongoing work by UNESCO, WMO, and UNEP. Another vital undertaking relates to the application and further development of international water quality standards, both regional and global. And finally, it will be necessary to overcome the existing fragmented institutional landscape related to water issues.

## **People's Diplomacy, Inter-Sectoral Water Management and Decision Making**

Since water management and transboundary water cooperation affects people's health and well-being directly, and therefore carries an important ethical dimension, water governance in all its forms has to allow all relevant stakeholders to participate in decision making. Moreover, the trade-offs necessary between the various uses of water such as agriculture, energy generation, mining, human consumption, and others, have to be carefully considered, while respecting the needs of all those concerned. Although most of the decisions taken in these situations are made within states, good practices should be studied and lessons learned internalized. When decisions are taken at the transboundary water cooperation level, arrangements should be made to allow the participation of all stakeholders.

Transparency and data sharing are particularly important aspects of decision making relating to water, and governments are well advised to ensure the necessary multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms. For these to be operated effectively, it is necessary to invest systematically in water education at all levels, including the empowerment of women. Best practices should be studied and lessons learned should be applied by all governments and other stakeholders. The UN Global Compact, which involves tens of thousands of private companies around the world, would be instrumental in developing an appropriate voluntary code of practice on water management.

## **Financial Innovation for Water Cooperation**

Since fostering transboundary water cooperation is an important priority in our era, it is necessary to develop sustainable financial mechanisms specifically aimed at promoting water as an instrument of peace. Transboundary water infrastructures such as dams and irrigation systems are currently financed by a variety of public and private sector investors, with funding available through existing financial facilities such as the International Waters (IW) Program of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), other climate finance mechanisms, and by bilateral and multilateral donors. The available conventional finance should also be used effectively to promote transboundary water cooperation projects.

Additional incentives are also necessary, and could include preferential and concessional finance for transboundary collaborative projects in water resources and infrastructure of a significant size. Incentives such as interest subsidies, financing of preparatory costs and insurance costs, as well as the provision of matching grants could also be provided. The Panel recommends the creation of a Blue Fund for these purposes. In addition, we believe that it is important to create a safe space, i.e. an opportunity for pre-negotiation consultations and other activities occurring at an early project development stage. This would help stakeholders address the major implementation problems well

in advance, prepare projects proactively, increase confidence among all stakeholders, and would significantly help the process of financial decision making.

### **In Pursuit of Agency: New Mechanisms of Hydro-Diplomacy**

A variety of international institutions are working on water issues, ranging from research and knowledge management organizations, river basin organizations or transboundary water management systems, to regional organizations and a variety of UN actors. While all of these institutions are doing important work and contributing to international water cooperation, what is needed now is an institutional setting that connects these key actors, and reinforces and complements the existing frameworks, initiatives and expertise. In other words, there is a need to leverage water as an instrument of cooperation and peace. We need a new mechanism to pursue “agency” as an increased capacity to act together, and not as another institution.

The Panel thus proposes the Global Observatory for Water and Peace (GOWP) to facilitate assistance to governments in using water as an instrument of cooperation, in avoiding tension and conflicts, and to build peace. The GOWP would work closely with existing organizations at the global and regional level, which specialize in water cooperation and harnessing the potential of water in building peace. The new mechanism would focus on hydro-diplomacy beyond joint management, and would also engage in consultative activities necessary for the creation of “safe spaces” for financing transboundary water cooperation projects.

### **Water as an Asset for Peace: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Report of the High Level Panel on Water and Peace consists of seven chapters covering the main areas of our analysis. Each chapter is concluded by a set of specific recommendations outlining further action. The Panel offers general conclusions and summarizes all of its recommendations in the final chapter, thus allowing the reader to see the whole picture of suggested further activities. The Panel hopes that its conclusions and recommendations will help decision makers develop a coherent vision of necessary future activities and assist in practical policy making.



**THE FULL REPORT CAN BE ACCESSED HERE:**

**<http://www.genevawaterhub.org/panel-water-peace>**

The Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace was launched on 16 November 2015 in Geneva by fifteen co-convening countries: Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Estonia, France, Ghana, Hungary, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Oman, Senegal, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland. Each of those countries has nominated a panellist who has worked *ad personam*. The Panel has benefitted from the support of the Geneva Water Hub, who has acted as its Secretariat, and of the Strategic Foresight Group, a Think Tank from Mumbai.

The Report of the Panel “A Matter of Survival” contains the analysis and the recommendations adopted by the Panel after two years of work in order to prevent water-related conflicts and to make water an instrument of peace. It has the ambition to address the water challenges in an integrated and comprehensive manner, at multiple levels, whether it is by fostering new practices, new institutions, water diplomacy or strengthening international law, among others. This leaflet contains an abstract of the recommendations of the Panel.

The Geneva Water Hub  
Secretariat of the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace

