



SOS

COMMITMENTS, NOT EXCUSES

UNITED NATIONS WATER CONFERENCE, MARCH 2023: EMMANUEL MACRON MUST STEP UP!

For the first time in 46 years, states will gather to discuss issues relating to water access and conservation at the United Nations **from 22 to 24 March 2023**. Secours Islamique France, Action contre la Faim and the Coalition Eau call upon Emmanuel Macron **to take part in this international conference and to support the organisation of regular meetings between states about water**. With increasingly frequent floods and more and more severe episodes of drought, even in France, access to and management of water at home and across the world should be a constant concern for the French government and the international community. **One United Nations meeting every forty-six years is not enough to solve the water crisis.**

WATER IN A STATE OF EMERGENCY

Water is one of the key issues of the twenty-first century.

Even though access to water and sanitation is a human right recognised by the United Nations, today, **2.2 billion people in the world do not have access to clean drinking water at home, while 3.6 billion do not have a toilet.**¹ France is affected, too: on the country's mainland, around 400,000 people are not connected to a drinking water supply or sanitation network, because they live on the streets or in informal settlements or makeshift shelters. The situation is even more alarming in France's overseas territories, where rates of connection to these essential networks are very low and the water is frequently cut off.

Throughout the world, the first victims of a lack of access to water are women and girls: in three quarters of households in developing countries, they are responsible for collecting water.² Gaining access to this resource is difficult and far from secure, which makes this task dangerous, time-consuming and physically demanding. A lack of access to water also has **dramatic health consequences.** Every year, more than 829,000 people die of diarrhoea caused by contaminated drinking water and a lack of sanitation and hygiene. **It is the second leading cause of death among children under five.**³

On top of the various other sources of pressure on our water resources (pollution, overexploitation, intensive farming, waste, monopolies, etc.), **climate change** is also having a huge impact, as more and more extreme water-related weather events are occurring. In 2022 alone, **floods in Pakistan** caused the death of more than 1,700 people, including 500 children,⁴ and **consecutive droughts in the Horn of Africa** pushed some 21 million people into a situation of serious food insecurity. Among them, 3.4 million people are at emergency levels of food insecurity

in Kenya and Somalia.⁵ In France, **2022 was the hottest year ever recorded** by Météo France, the national meteorological service: water usage restrictions were therefore put in place in 48 departments,⁶ thus putting agricultural production at risk. Conflicts surrounding access to water are becoming increasingly frequent and include both localised disagreements, such as the controversy around 'mega-basin' projects in France, and tensions between states like Egypt and Ethiopia, which have clashed over the subject of the Nile.

In many countries, **water markets have even been created.** This paves the way for speculation on water prices, which favours the most powerful economic agents to the detriment of the human right to drinking water, farmers' access to water and ecosystems' needs. All over the world, human rights and environment activists are trying to stand up for access to water resources, **despite the threats and restrictions being applied to the civic space.**

The climate crisis and a lack of appropriate responses to it have deepened inequalities in access to water and sanitation.

This access is essential for human rights to be guaranteed, for socioeconomic development to occur, and for the risk of conflict to be reduced. The forecasts are alarming:

⚠ Without a radical change on an international level, the United Nations estimates that, in 2050, half of the world's population will be living in conditions of water stress (UN-Water 2020).

⚠ Currently, 25% of the global population is experiencing extreme water stress (World Bank, 2021).



TIME TO WAKE UP!

Despite the **UN's recognition of the human rights of access to water and sanitation** in 2010 and the adoption of **Sustainable Development Goal 6**, which aims to ensure sustainable water management and access to drinking water and sanitation for all by 2030, **progress is too slow.** According to UN-Water, current **efforts must be quadrupled in intensity** on a global scale if we are to achieve SDG 6 by 2030.⁷

The conditions needed for this acceleration are not currently in place. A lack of governance in the sector is slowing down progress. Unlike other sectors, **water management is not subject to**

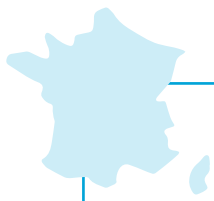
any 'restrictive' international policies. Besides two conventions on transboundary waters, which have not been ratified widely enough, and some bilateral agreements between states, there are no international treaties concerning water issues. **There is no United Nations agency dedicated to water,** like the Green Climate Fund and the vertical health funds. **No committee or intergovernmental space** has organised regular meetings between states about water, even though this is something that has been implemented in other sectors, like the World Health Assembly and the COP climate change conference, for example.

¹ WHO/UNICEF 2021 • ² Wateraid, WashMatters: Gender equality and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) • ³ WHO 2021 • ⁴ UNICEF 2022

⁵ UN Info : <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2022/11/1129557>

⁶ Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion: <https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/secheresse-economiser-leau>

⁷ WHO/UNICEF 2021



France is committed on a national and international level to increasing access to water and sanitation and to ensuring better management of this precious resource.

- France recognised access to water and sanitation as a human right at the United Nations General Assembly in 2010.
- Through the 2030 Agenda, France has committed to guaranteeing universal access to water and sustainable management of it by 2030.
- France supports integrated water resources management as a tool for good governance, through texts such as the Helsinki (1992) and New York (1997) conventions.
- The Programming Act of 4 August 2021 on inclusive development and the fight against global inequalities makes water a priority sector for France's development and humanitarian aid.
- France's International Strategy for Water and Sanitation (2020–2030) has identified governance of the water sector as a priority area for improvement.
- The French government has launched its first environmental planning project, dedicated to water management.

OUR DEMANDS FOR EMMANUEL MACRON

The United Nations 2023 Water Conference, which will take place in New York on **22, 23 and 24 March**, is **the first inter-governmental meeting on the subject of water in 46 years**. Even if no political agreement is negotiated, it represents a unique opportunity to take action to strengthen governance in the sector and remobilise states. **To tackle water-related issues, a strong international commitment is essential.**

Secours Islamique France, Action contre la Faim and the Coalition Eau call upon Emmanuel Macron to attend the United Nations 2023 Water Conference in order to:

- **Reaffirm France's commitment** to ensuring water and sanitation access for all and to preserving and sharing this resource.
- **Provide political leadership** in the field of water and sanitation.
- **Urge the international community to mobilise** on the issue of global water governance.

Secours Islamique France, Action contre la Faim and the Coalition Eau advise the government to take on ambitious commitments in its political declaration for the United Nations Conference and as part of the 'Water Action Agenda'.

France must commit to:

- **Striving to achieve a United Nations General Assembly resolution** establishing regular intergovernmental meetings on water and sanitation in September 2023.
- **Supporting the political mandate of the Special Envoy of the United Nations for Water – whose nomination was encouraged by France – to steer the United Nations' reflections on international water governance** and this

figure's role in monitoring the voluntary commitments made by states as part of the *Water Action Agenda*.

- **Including a 'freshwater' segment in the United Nations Oceans Conference**, which France has committed to hosting, along with Costa Rica, in 2025.
- **Organising a One Planet Summit on water in France** as announced by the President of the Republic during his speech to ambassadors in September 2022.
- **Allocating enough human and financial resources** to implement the Programming Act of 4 August 2021 on inclusive development and the fight against global inequalities, which makes water a priority sector for intervention, and to execute France's international strategy for water and sanitation. The workforce must be strengthened in the competent ministries on international water issues (MEAE, MTECS, MSP⁸).
- **Assigning an ambassador for water in France**. Associated with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion, the ambassador will exercise an interministerial coordination role, take French priorities to the highest international levels, and act as the main interlocutor for the Special Envoy of the United Nations for Water.
- **Achieving SDG 6 in France** by taking measures to effectively guarantee the human rights to water and sanitation, especially in overseas territories, and to ensure proper management and conservation of water resources.

⁸ Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion, Ministry of Health and Prevention



Founded in 1991, Secours Islamique France (SIF) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) for international solidarity dedicated to social and humanitarian causes and acting in the fields of humanitarian assistance and development aid, both in France and beyond. Our actions aim to support anyone in need, without proselytism or any distinction according to gender, religion or culture.

<https://www.secours-islamique.org>

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Created in 1979, Action contre la Faim is a non-governmental organisation that fights world hunger. Its mission is to save lives by eliminating hunger through the prevention, detection and treatment of malnutrition, especially during and after emergency situations linked to conflicts and natural disasters. In 2021, Action contre la Faim helped more than 26 million people in 51 countries all over the world.

<https://www.actioncontrelafaim.org>

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The Coalition Eau is a group of French NGOs committed to fighting for the human rights to water and sanitation and for water as a public good.

<https://www.coalition-eau.org>

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Check out on social media the campaign **#sEAUs**

