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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Partnering with organizations

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Pedro Arrojo Agudo*

Summary

As part of the Special Rapporteur's initiative to consult various stakeholders, between January and April 2021, he convened bilateral meetings with 24 international and regional organizations whose work focuses on water, sanitation and hygiene. The report compiles the ways the Special Rapporteur would like to collaborate with those organizations in accordance with his vision and plans for 2020-2023.

* Reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.



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I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to its resolutions 16/2 and 45/8, the Human Rights Council encouraged the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Pedro Arrojo Agudo, to work on identifying challenges and obstacles to the full realization of those rights, as well as protection gaps thereto, and to continue to identify good practices and enabling factors in that regard.
2. The present report should be read in conjunction with the first report submitted by the Special Rapporteur (A/HRC/48/50), in which he introduces his plan and vision for the first three years of his mandate, from 2020 to 2023. In that report, under the heading “5. Cooperation with international and regional organizations and the Sustainable Development Goals”, the Special Rapporteur reiterated his efforts to better understand the roles and responsibilities of international and regional organizations in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services (A/HRC/48/50, para. 86).
3. After commencing his position in November 2020, as part of the Special Rapporteur’s initiative to consult various stakeholders, the Special Rapporteur called for bilateral meetings with international and regional organizations and 24 organizations have responded to his call. Between January and April 2021, the Special Rapporteur convened bilateral meetings with those organizations that opened up various cooperation lines. Following the meetings, the Special Rapporteur produced two-pager summaries that introduce salient work of these organizations and the way forward for the Special Rapporteur to collaborate with those organizations during his tenure.¹ The present report compiles the ways to collaborate with those organizations in accordance with the Special Rapporteur’s vision and plans for 2020-2023.
4. In its resolution 45/8, the Human Rights Council “invite[d] regional and international organizations to complement the efforts made by States to progressively realize the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, in accordance with their respective mandates”. The current addendum report by the Special Rapporteur seeks to pave the way forward to assist regional and international organization to respond to such invitation.

II. Special Rapporteur’s three key objectives

5. The Special Rapporteur identified three key objectives that will mark the main strands of his work during his first term from 2020 to 2023: (1) promote democratic water and sanitation governance; (2) further the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, focusing on restoring the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems; and (3) promote water as a key to collaboration and peace (A/HRC/48/50, paras. 68 – 72) The current section introduces how the Special Rapporteur would like to collaborate with international and regional organizations to reach those key objectives.

A. Clarifying ways to promote democratic water and sanitation governance

6. Integrating the management of the multiple uses and functions of water, as a public good – or as part of the commons, where a community-based approach to water and sanitation management is alive and well, is a complex challenge that goes beyond the capacities of the market. Today, democratic water and sanitation governance must enable society to address climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic within the framework of the global water crisis, strengthening environmental and social resilience, activating the gender perspective and paying special attention to those living in extreme poverty (A/HRC/48/50, para. 70).
7. The Special Rapporteur aims to clarify the steps that need to be taken to promote democratic water governance, taking a sustainable and human rights-based approach in

1. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/Partnering-with-other-organizations.aspx>.

different contexts, but not limited to, in urban and rural areas and in areas inhabited by indigenous peoples (A/HRC/48/50, para. 7). To reach this aim, the Special Rapporteur believes that the work of several international and regional organizations are relevant.

8. **International Labour Organization (ILO):** The only tripartite United Nations agency, since 1919, the ILO brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all. The main aims of the ILO are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues. In 1998, all ILO members committed to the adoption of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which focused on the protection of the fundamental principles and rights for the promotion and enhancement of decent work. Several of ILO's focus on decent work and WASH have cross-cutting areas. The Special Rapporteur shares ILO's "local resources-based approach" of empowering local communities, particularly rural communities, by valuing the knowledge of local people and building their capacities. He notes that there is a lot we can learn from traditional community aqueducts, for instance. The commitment and expertise of workers in WASH services, from the perspective of democratic governance, includes the effective public participation of community users to the extent that the conception of water as a common good is assumed and the link between these services and the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation is understood.

9. **UN Children's Fund (UNICEF):** UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities. UNICEF's main goal is to enhance the protection of children's rights, ensuring that they are able to enjoy their full potential from childhood until adolescence. UNICEF's engagement to monitor SDG 6.1 and 6.2, helps countries to have a clearer benchmark and information to promote and guarantee the human rights to water and sanitation and also empowers people in vulnerable situations without access to water and sanitation. In this regard, the Special Rapporteur looks forward to working with UNICEF throughout his tenure to promote democratic water governance from a human rights approach in different contexts.

10. **UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):** As a multilateral platform, UNECE facilitates greater economic integration and cooperation among its member countries and promotes sustainable development and economic prosperity. UNECE also hosts a number of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (Conventions and Protocols), some of which are of global reach. The UNECE, together with the WHO/Europe, provides the secretariat functions for the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The Special Rapporteur notes that ratifying the Protocol on Water and Health is one concrete step that States in the pan-European region can take to realise the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and hence to implement the SDG6. He would like to work, together with UNECE and WHO/Europe, to develop the legal recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation as a cornerstone of public health, especially today, since the harsh experience of the pandemic has led to a growing consensus on the need to strengthen public health systems and water and sanitation services as a global democratic imperative.

11. **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD):** OECD works on establishing evidence-based international standards and finding solutions to a range of social, economic and environmental challenges. Following the OECD Council Recommendation on Water (December 2016), OECD provides policy guidance on water to OECD members and non-OECD countries, covering a wide range of issues, among them water quantity and quality; water risks, disasters and climate change; water governance; water finance, investment and pricing. The Special Rapporteur looks forward to collaborating with OECD to further raise awareness on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation in the area of water finance and beyond.

B. Furthering the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, focusing on restoring the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems

12. The Special Rapporteur insists that it is only by making decisive progress in restoring the health of aquatic ecosystems that the fulfilment of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation of people living in poverty can be achieved. Likewise, only by making decisive progress in sanitation and cleaning up discharges will it be possible to restore the health of aquatic ecosystems. The only viable strategy to ensure that the 2.2 billion impoverished people currently lacking safe drinking water and the 4.2 billion currently lacking sanitation have them at affordable costs is to make peace with the rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers on which those people depend for their livelihoods. The Special Rapporteur's second objective, therefore, focuses on clarifying the link between those human rights and the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems and on promoting strategies that link the two challenges (A/HRC/48/50, para. 71). Based on the coherence of the sustainability paradigm, the Special Rapporteur finds that it is necessary to develop an ecosystem approach that requires integrated management of the different uses and functions of water (A/HRC/48/50, para. 7) and in this regard, he notes that work of several international organizations is aligned with the ecosystem approach.

13. **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP):** UNEP is the global environmental steward that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the UN system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. UNEP works to advance environmental and human rights. According to the Special Rapporteur: "when rivers are polluted, it is more difficult for the population in vulnerable situations - often living near rivers and relying on rivers as a source of water - to have affordable access to water of good quality". In other words, environmental sustainability and the human rights to water and sanitation are convergent challenges. The Special Rapporteur looks forward to collaborating with UNEP on elaborating the links between the human rights to water and sanitation and environmental degradation.

14. **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):** FAO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. FAO aims to provide food security, ensuring that people have access to enough high-quality food to live a healthy and decent life. FAO is the custodian agency to monitor SDG 6.4 on water stress and efficiency. Access to water is key to meeting both the right to food and the right to drinking water and sanitation and for this reason, the Special Rapporteur places the highest priority, as water for life, on both drinking water for supply and sanitation and water needed to ensure food sufficiency and food sovereignty, especially for communities in vulnerable situations. FAO is advocating multiple-use systems from an integrated approach encompassing both irrigation water structure for rural communities and drinking water. The Special Rapporteur's alignment with FAO's integrated approach includes the need for sustainable management of freshwater aquatic ecosystems as one of the essential keys from the perspective of ongoing climate change. For a system aimed at multiple uses of water to function, it is important to address water vulnerability from a holistic approach starting from ensuring the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems, particularly freshwater.

15. **The Secretariat of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):** CBD is the international legal instrument for "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources". The Special Rapporteur's vision and values that would guide the first three years of mandate resonates closely with CBD's approach to interrelated issues impacting biodiversity and ecosystems. The biodiversity of an ecosystem is undoubtedly the key indicator of the state of that ecosystem. Therefore, insofar as the Special Rapporteur considers the recovery of the good state of aquatic ecosystems to be key, he defends the importance of biodiversity in these ecosystems, not only as an indicator of their good state but also as a guarantee of their functionality (in functions such as the regeneration and purification of their flows), which are essential to guarantee the human rights to drinking water and sanitation of the most impoverished. He, therefore, looks forward to working

together on promoting water and sanitation issues within the global efforts to protect biodiversity.

16. **International Organization for Migration (IOM):** IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people. As part of its mandate on migration, environment and climate change, IOM has been examining the nexus between migration and water governance and exploring potential synergies between both policy domains. The Special Rapporteur is interested in IOM's new approach on migration, climate change and water, linking to social dimensions. This approach is in line with his vision, namely, the socio-environmental approach to the human rights to water and sanitation and the promotion of democratic water governance. The approach also connects with his concern about the impact of climate change on arid and semi-arid territories that may become uninhabitable in a few decades due to physical lack of water and the impact of prolonged and severe droughts.

17. **The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR):** UNDRR is the designated focal point in the United Nations system for the coordination of disaster reduction. UNDRR works globally with a wide range of partners and stakeholders towards the prevention of new and the reduction of existing disaster risks. Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and other global development goals, UNDRR promotes the strengthening of resilience through successful multi-hazard disaster risk management. The Special Rapporteur reiterates that Earth, the blue planet, is in the middle of a water crisis: the two failures relating to poverty and unsustainability are accelerating both the incidence and impact of water-related disasters. The Special Rapporteur insists that while the key driver of climate change is energy and, therefore, mitigation strategies are driven by the energy transition, the main social impacts of climate change are water-related, which is why adaptation strategies should be driven by the water transition, strengthening environmental and social resilience to drought and flood risks. Therefore, he looks forward to working with UNDRR, particularly on preparedness and risk mitigation to safeguard the human rights to water and sanitation.

C. Promoting water as a key to collaboration and peace

18. The Special Rapporteur, based on his experience in such conflicts, insists on the importance of listening to and opening up space for women as a key to non-violent conflict resolution. Clearly, respect for the human rights of communities involved in water-related conflicts and the security of their leaders, who are currently under threat, is essential. That said, water disputes between regions or countries fuel conflicts that can lead to wars. However, water offers reasons and arguments for agreement and collaboration, if an ecosystem approach is taken. If it is a matter of managing a river or a river basin in all its richness and complexity, rather than competing for water as a resource, the need for collaboration will emerge. Of course, the benefits and efforts to be made upstream and downstream are often not symmetrical, and dialogue and negotiation are therefore necessary (A/HRC/48/50, para. 72).

19. **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA):** ESCWA was established in 1973 to stimulate economic activity in member countries in Western Asia, strengthen cooperation between them, and promote development. UNESCWA implements the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), which aims to provide access to information that can facilitate cooperation, coordination, dialogue, and exchange among the Arab States, organizations and stakeholder and to support awareness-raising as well as regional networking and exchange on issues related to climate change and water resources in the region. The Special Rapporteur is greatly interested in working with States and other actors in Western Asia in order to transform and place water as a tool for peace.

III. Current state of play: the Special Rapporteur's reflections on Global water crisis

A. Two major structural flaws of Global water crisis

20. The Special Rapporteur understands that the root causes of the global water crisis lie at the confluence of two major structural flaws in the current development model: (1) The unsustainability of the aquatic ecosystems, which degrades the quality of its flows, turning water from being the key to life into a terrible vector of disease and death and (2) the poverty, inequality and discrimination under the prevailing socioeconomic order (A/HRC/48/50, para. 21).

1. The unsustainability of the aquatic ecosystems

21. The health of people, especially those living in poverty, is closely related to the health and ecological status of the rivers or aquifers from which they receive water. Therefore, the health of those ecosystems has an impact on the enjoyment of the human rights to water and sanitation. Degrading or breaking the sustainability of rivers, wetlands and aquifers also endangers other human rights by affecting fishing and the livelihoods of riverine communities. It can also seriously affect the sustainability of the deltas and beaches on which many people's lives depend (A/HRC/48/50, para. 42). Restoring the sustainability and health of rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers and their functionality is essential to addressing the global water crisis, especially in the context of ongoing climate change. It is urgent to put an end to the abusive exploitation of many aquifers, which are the water lungs of nature, so that they also become strategic reserves for droughts under the ongoing climate change (A/HRC/48/50, para. 47).

22. **World Food Programme (WFP):** WFP's efforts focus on emergency assistance, relief and rehabilitation, development aid and special operations through direct assistance or by strengthening country capacities. Access to water and sanitation are rooted in WFP's projects, generally from the perspective of food security and sustainable livelihood. From the perspective of the Special Rapporteur, a healthy river is the guarantee of abundant drinking water and even food, providing for irrigation to grow crops and for fishing. Problems emerge when large extractive ventures, hydraulic megaprojects, deforestation or large agribusiness break the sustainability of ecosystems and, in particular, of the rivers on which those communities depend. WFP's work to enhance the ecology of the food systems is also an element of the sustainability of the aquatic ecosystem, which the Special Rapporteur plans to focus during the first three years of his mandate.

23. **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** As the United Nations' lead agency on international development, UNDP works in 170 countries and territories to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality. UNDP's mandate is to end poverty, build democratic governance, the rule of law, and inclusive institutions. The UNDP helps countries achieve integrated, climate-resilient, sustainable and equitable management of water resources and universal access to safe water supply and sanitation. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that biodiversity is the best indicator of the health and functions of ecosystems on which the drinking water of riparian communities depends. Also, the quality of drinking water is closely related to the health and state of the ecosystem. He believes that UNDP's work on sustainable and equitable management of water resources and a nature-based approach is closely linked to his mandate and vision.

24. **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):** UNESCO seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO established the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) in 2000 in response to a call from the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to produce a UN system-wide periodic global overview of the status in terms of quantity and quality, use and management of freshwater resources. WWAP coordinates the work of UN-Water 31 members and 39 partners in the UN World Water Development Report (WWDR), the flagship report on freshwater providing an authoritative picture of the state, use and management of the world's freshwater resources. The Special Rapporteur believes that a

sustainable aquatic ecosystem is a prerequisite to universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation. There is a clear need to ensure integrated and sustainable management of river basins, with special attention to aquifers as the backbone of the network of rivers, wetlands and lakes that sustain life on islands and continents. In this regard, it is the Special Rapporteur's pleasure to contribute and work with UNESCO-WWAP on the UN-Water Global Report for 2022 on groundwater, and he looks forward to future collaboration with other parts of UNESCO.

2. Poverty, inequality and discrimination

25. Poverty must be understood not only as a lack of income. It is closely linked to a lack of education, water and sanitation, health, housing, energy, work and opportunities for a dignified life, as well as to marginalization and inequality arising from unequal power relations. In particular, discrimination against women and girls in many communities disproportionately affects the level of poverty in which they live and their access to safe drinking water and sanitation, including necessary menstrual hygiene. In addition, women and girls are often still the ones who carry the burden of bringing water home, which keeps them out of school or paid jobs, thus feeding the cycle of poverty (A/HRC/48/50, para. 34). One of the benchmarks of poverty in both developing and developed countries is water poverty that arises in the form of water disconnections to poor families due to non-payment. Such disconnections, in the Special Rapporteur's view, should be considered a violation of their human rights to water and sanitation (A/HRC/48/50, para. 41).

26. **The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA):** UN DESA is a pioneer of sustainable development and the home of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where each goal finds its space and where all stakeholders can do their part to leave no one behind. UN DESA is a leading analytical voice for promoting inclusion, reducing inequalities and eradicating poverty, and a champion for tearing down the barriers that keep people in poverty. UN DESA's work focused on leaving no one behind and on the inclusion of those in most vulnerable situations is closely related to the inequality, poverty and discrimination, which the Special Rapporteur has identified as a flaw contributing to the global water crisis. He looks forward to working with UN DESA in addressing this flaw and also related to indigenous peoples and people living in impoverished rural areas, which are the themes of his reports in 2022.

27. **The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB):** IADB is devoted to improving lives and is a leading source of long-term financing for economic, social and institutional development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The IDB's focus on the human rights to water and sanitation (HRWS) agenda has focused on the implementation of the approach, providing the region's governments and sector entities with tools to advance the criteria and principles of the HRWS framework. IDB has focused on supporting the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation in the Latin American region, with a specific focus on targeting populations living in situations of vulnerability or marginalization, for example, rural populations. The Special Rapporteur looks forward to sharing knowledge with IDB on these themes, which are central to his vision of his mandate.

B. Three factors that are deepening the global water crisis

28. There are currently three factors that are directly and indirectly aggravating and intensifying the global water crisis: the commodification and financialization of water, climate change and recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has deepened inequalities and extended poverty (A/HRC/48/50, para 22).

1. Climate change, risks and impact

29. The main socioeconomic impacts of climate change are generated around the water vector, which should lead to adaptation strategies being dominated by the above-mentioned hydrological transition based on the sustainability paradigm (A/HRC/48/50, para. 50). The devastating socioeconomic impacts of changes in the water cycle call for urgent adaptation strategies in order to increase the resilience of aquatic ecosystems to extreme events and to

increase social resilience, on the basis of the fulfilment of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, especially of the most at-risk population groups, which are always those living in poverty and/or marginalization (A/HRC/48/50, para. 53). In order to overcome the challenge associated with climate change, the Special Rapporteur notes that several international organizations are working on the issue and would like to collaborate with them.

30. **UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):** UNHCR is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. The experience of displacement or statelessness enhances the need for protection under international, regional and national human rights frameworks. UNHCR's engagement with human rights systems helps to ensure that the protection of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons is integrated into human rights discourse. In the first three years of his mandate, the Special Rapporteur plans to focus on the impact of climate change on the human rights to water and sanitation. Access to water and sanitation for displaced persons, including those displaced by climate change and disasters, will be at the center of his work. Related to this topic, he would like to have a permanent dialogue with UNHCR.

31. **World Meteorological Organization (WMO):** WMO is a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to international cooperation and coordination on the state and behavior of the Earth's atmosphere, its interaction with the land and oceans, the weather and climate it produces, and the resulting distribution of water resources. The Special Rapporteur looks forward to collaborating with WMO in developing adaptation strategies to ongoing climate change and increasing environmental resilience in ways that minimize the impacts of droughts and floods. The effective fulfilment of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation is key to strengthening social resilience. Strengthening environmental resilience and social resilience is a key to adaptation strategies to minimize the effects of climate change, especially on the poorest living in the most vulnerable situations.

32. **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat:** Established in 1992 at the time of the adoption of the UNFCCC, the UNFCCC secretariat is the United Nations entity tasked with supporting the global response to the threat of climate change. Focusing in its early years largely on facilitating the intergovernmental climate change negotiations, the secretariat today supports a complex architecture of bodies that serve to advance the implementation of the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. As one of the main global threats that hinder the exercise and enjoyment of human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, the Special Rapporteur will prioritize climate change as one of his main priorities. The Special Rapporteur hopes to collaborate with the Secretariat of the UNFCCC to establish resiliency and adaptation mechanisms to mitigate the impact of climate change on the human rights to water and sanitation.

2. COVID-19 pandemic, risks and impact

33. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of all people and forced the world to undertake a collective response. The option of shielding borders to restrict risks to remote countries, as was achieved with other diseases, did not work with COVID-19; the virus travelled by plane, even in business class. Although vulnerability is greatest in impoverished populations, particularly among women and girls, as well as other marginalized groups, no one will be out of harm's way until everyone is under cover (A/HRC/48/50, para. 56). In this context, a consensus is growing on the need to strengthen public health systems as a public and not-for-profit challenge that must leave no one behind, integrating into this logic the strengthening of WASH services as a cornerstone of public health. For this reason, dedicating a significant part of the powerful public funds earmarked for socio-economic reactivation after the pandemic (Green New Deal) to this type of investment must be understood as a democratic imperative that cannot be neglected.

34. With regard to public health risks, there is a need to integrate environmental and social factors, with the consequent need to integrate social resilience and environmental resilience. It is necessary to critically evaluate the development of massive and intensive industrial livestock and to develop strategies for the protection of biodiversity as part of adaptation and mitigation strategies regarding public health (A/HRC/48/50, para. 60). Several international

and regional organizations have put recovery and restoration from the social consequences arising from COVID-19.

35. **The World Health Organization (WHO):** WHO is a specialized agency of the UN responsible for international public health. It works closely with decision-makers: Ministries of Health, government agencies, other government departments at the national level. The global experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted that water, sanitation, and hygiene are the foundation of health. The Special Rapporteur considers it essential to enhance the global leadership of UN-Water in the face of the world water crisis and efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the full enjoyment of the human rights to water and sanitation. Central to this is the leadership of the WHO which must also be strengthened in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and future risks to global public health (A/HRC/48/50, para. 86).

36. **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC):** The overall purpose of ECLAC is to promote the economic, social and environmentally sustainable development of Latin America and the Caribbean through continuous international cooperation. ECLAC Secretariat's Division of Natural Resources function focuses on strengthening the institutional capacity of the countries to improve the governance, policies, management and sustainable use of natural resources and associated ecosystem and basic services, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. The COVID-19 crisis is one of the three pillars based on which the Special Rapporteur will plan his activities. He would like to develop a global mapping of the situation on water disconnections - both in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond - particularly for those who are not capable of paying for water. He has started this exercise in the Latin America region (GRULAC) and looks forward to working on this with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

3. Challenge of democratic water governance

37. To face the global water crisis with those 2.2 billion people without guaranteed drinking water and 4.2 billion without sanitation, it is necessary to build and strengthen democratic governance practices (A/HRC/48/50, para. 67). In the Special Rapporteur's view, water must continue to be considered as a public good (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 15 (2002), para. 1), preserving the values of participation and common responsibility treasured by community-based management. The global water crisis must be met by promoting democratic water governance that ensures the sustainability of ecosystems and develops a human rights-based approach to water management under legal rules that regulate the ethical priorities (A/HRC/48/50, para. 65).

38. Over the last decades, the weakening of the public service in favor of private initiatives, culminating in austerity strategies, has contributed to increasing the problems of inequality and marginalization of the poorest. The harsh experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to understand the need to strengthen social and environmental resilience in the face of health and climate change risks, leaving no one behind. The Special Rapporteur believes that in this context, from all the institutions, programmes and mandates of the UN system, we must understand this juncture as a window of opportunity to advance in the global democratic governance that the UN must lead. In this context, he understands that it is essential to promote democratic governance of water and sanitation services and aquatic ecosystems in the face of the pressures of privatization, commodification and financialization of water.

IV. Special Rapporteur's specific plans (2020–2023)

39. In addition to identifying themes of the reports (A/HRC/48/50, paras. 73 to 78) and the two official country visits (A/HRC/48/50, paras. 82-84), the Special Rapporteur sets out concrete objectives and plans for his first three years as mandate holder including building bridges of permanent dialogue (A/HRC/48/50, paras. 79 – 81), communication letters and cooperation with international and regional organizations and the SDGs. While all of the Special Rapporteur's plans for the period 2020 to 2023 requires collaboration from various

international and regional organizations, the objective to “build bridges of permanent dialogue” and cooperation on Sustainable Development Goals specifically requires collaboration with various organizations.

1. Building bridges of permanent dialogue

40. **The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat):** UN-Habitat is the United Nations programme for human settlements and sustainable urban development. UN-Habitat established GWOPA in 2009 as a global network to support peer support capacity development partnerships between water utilities “Water Operators' Partnerships (WOPs)”. The Special Rapporteur notes that the disparities between access to water and sanitation in urban and rural areas is a key barrier to the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation. UN-Habitat's approach to tackling this inequality and promoting local partnerships and resilience through GWOPA will be relevant to the Special Rapporteur's 2022 thematic report on the human rights to water and sanitation in impoverished rural areas.

41. **The International Telecommunication Union (ITU):** ITU is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies – ICTs. Among others, ITU coordinates this vast and growing range of radio communication services, as well as the international management of the radio-frequency spectrum and satellite orbits. ITU's work, particularly on radio communications and the smart village platform is of great interest to the Special Rapporteur. He believes that, together with the efforts made in communication through the internet, largely forced by the pandemic, it could and should be complemented by communication through radio, which everyone hears even in the most remote rural areas. Promoting a network of local radio stations at regional levels in the respective languages is an idea that the Special Rapporteur wants to transform into a project to develop. The development of ICTs and radio communication is a way to empower the people, which is an element of global democratic governance.

2. Cooperation with international and regional organizations and the Sustainable Development Goals

42. The Special Rapporteur wants to pay special attention to UN-Water, multiplying interviews with its members from the beginning of his mandate, as he considers it essential to enhance the global leadership of UN-Water in the face of the world water crisis and efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 and other water-related Sustainable Development Goals (A/HRC/48/50, para. 86).

V. Final reflections

43. **To close this report, the Special Rapporteur would like to offer two final reflections:**

44. **Water offers us an exceptional platform for social pedagogy to better understand the necessary convergence of social and environmental values; a convergence that is evident in the need to recover and conserve the health and sustainability of our aquatic ecosystems if we want to effectively guarantee the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation among the most impoverished and marginalized.**

45. **On the other hand, we live in times of pain and at the same time of hope because these are times of epochal change. Times in which we live and feel with increasing intensity the need for democratic global governance with human rights at its core, based on strengthening the effective capacities of the United Nations. In this context, the Special Rapporteur considers it essential to strengthen UN-Water in the global leadership that is needed to address the global water crisis in the context of climate change and the risks to public health that we are suffering today with the COVID-19 pandemic.**

46. **For all these reasons, the Special Rapporteur pledges an unconditional commitment and a systematic work of collaboration with all the institutions of the UN system and in particular with all those working in UN-Water.**

47. Finally, the Special Rapporteur wishes to express: "It is a privilege to be able to draw on the enormous capacities, knowledge and experience of the institutions and entities of the United Nations system, and I will certainly require their support and advice. But I also believe that as the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation I believe I can be useful in opening up perspectives and proposing solutions in contentious thematic areas where the different institutions of the United Nations system are under strong pressure."
