



UN  
2023 WATER  
CONFERENCE

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## UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

### *Water Security, Disasters, and Resilience in a Changing Climate: Challenges, Opportunities, and Solutions*

March 24, 2023, 12:30-13:45, Room B, UN Headquarters

Organized by: York University OneWATER, CIFAL York,  
Stockholm International Water Institute, mWater, Global Water  
Promise, and Urban Water Toronto Metropolitan University

#### **Background on the event**

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The impacts of global environmental degradation on freshwater security are felt by communities around the world limiting the availability, equitable access, and quality of freshwater supplies. These impacts are exacerbated by underlying social inequities and environmental stressors, including the increasing number and intensity of disastrous extreme weather events attributed to climate change. This side event aims to highlight some of the key challenges that water insecurity poses to communities in Canada and around the globe, including contextualizing legal, cultural, historical, political, scientific, technological, and Indigenous insights into: why hundreds of Indigenous communities in Canada continue to be unable to access clean drinking water in a country with over 9 million lakes and over 20% of the world's freshwater supply, how to develop sustainable management plans for resources in the Congo Basin, and how to manage the water crisis in the Colorado basin. Moreover, we offer scientific, technological, and natural solutions to improve the resilience of freshwater systems, including the use of UV, advanced oxidation processes, and nanotechnology applied to water purification and water treatment in remote and Arctic communities, machine learning and artificial intelligence to maintain water quality, empowering women and providing education for children to safeguard water supplies, and developing policies around water cooperation across stakeholders and sectors. Our aim is to use our side event as an opportunity to contextualize trans-disciplinary research and lived experiences to shed light on freshwater security against the backdrop of global efforts to boost ambition, transdisciplinary, and cross-boundary action on adaptation to the impacts of planetary stressors on freshwater security.

## **Water Action Agenda**

We will continue to research, learn about, write about, and share our understandings of how ongoing colonialism endangers water security and ecosystems worldwide. We will work towards Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization -- First Peoples' self-determination over their land, cultures, governance, and economic systems – not only as a matter of justice, but for the water. We are also committed to pushing for greater environmental protections in tandem with greater protections for women, including those victimized by transactional sex through water resources. We will raise and champion the voices of the most affected by water insecurity. We will commit to sharing data freely to help address and understand the drivers of water insecurity globally.

## **Key Issues discussed**

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- Freshwater is distributed unequally and marginalized communities around the world are vulnerable to inequitable access to clean water.
- Young girls and women in Ghana are forced to trade sex for access to clean water and menstrual products. Addressing global water insecurity inevitably means bringing an end to period poverty.
- Indigenous communities in Canada continue to face water insecurity and boiling water advisories and we discussed some of the underlying issues and challenges.
- The importance of building relationships and collaborations with Indigenous communities to improve access to safe drinking water for Indigenous people in Canada.
- The importance of water governance and a free and open access platform for mapping and monitoring infrastructure, deploying mobile surveys for data collection, managing data, and displaying real time visualizations of data for collaboration and reporting.

## **Key recommendations for action**

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We call for all UN water initiatives to lead with water protectors—those who are Indigenous, elders, women, youth, and marginalized peoples. We urge the UN to commit to the following:

- That water be honoured, recognized, and celebrated with opportunities for cultural expressions and ceremonies.
- To follow the leadership of Indigenous peoples, to acknowledge water as a living entity/entities in interrelational accord with all existence, not as a resource for profit and extraction.
- To move beyond rights frameworks, toward responsibilities to protect water.
- To support self-determination of Indigenous peoples, including decisions about issues that may impact their territories and peoples.
- To respect indigenous knowledge. Indigenous peoples should lead research that affects them, and should own and have access to their data and information.