

Calcutta Notebook

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The right to health was originally recognized in 1946 by the World Health Organization. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared, among others, "the right to life", "the right to education" and "the right to work". In 1966 these were furthered in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights with the recognition of "the right to social security", and "the right to an adequate standard of living," including adequate food, clothing and adequate shelter.

However, the human right to water has continued to fail to be fully recognized, despite clear references in various international legal instruments such as: the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Diarrhea is the second largest cause of death among children under five. The lack of access to potable water kills more children than AIDS, malaria and smallpox combined.

Worldwide, approximately one in eight people lack potable water.

In just one day, more than 200 million hours of women's time is consumed by collecting and transporting water for domestic use.

The situation of lack of sanitation is far worse, for it affects 2.6 billion people, or 40% of the global population.

The vast majority of illnesses around the world are caused by fecal matter.

It is estimated that sanitation could reduce child death due to diarrhea by more than one third.

On any given day, half of the hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from illnesses associated with lack of access to safe water and lack of sanitation.

Human rights were not born as fully developed concepts, but are built on reality and experience. For example, the human rights to education and work included in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights were constructed and specified over time, with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international legal instruments such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The same will occur with the human right to water and sanitation.

The right to drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life. Water is life. It's to be noted that the loss of 20% body water can cause death.

Drinking water and sanitation are not only elements or principal components of other rights such as "the right to an adequate standard of living." The right to drinking water and sanitation are independent rights that should be recognized as such. It is not sufficient to urge governments to comply with their human rights obligations relative to access to drinking water and sanitation. Instead, it is necessary to call on governments to promote and protect the human right to drinking water and sanitation. □□□