HRC33 NGO Oral Statement

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on the right to Water and Sanitation

13 September 2016

The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, and the focus of the current report on gender equality. We support the Special Rapporteur’s recognition that safe, adequate and affordable access to water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as the promotion of women’s empowerment, can serve as an entry point to ensure that women and girls can have access to opportunities and resources, and enjoy their right to control their own lives, both inside and outside the home.

Globally, gendered division of labor in water collection shows that women and girls together represent 75 per cent of household water collectors, and that in some countries the proportion reaches up to 90 per cent. This is a significant burden in terms of time and labor. According to a combined analysis of 25 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, women spend at least 16 million hours per day collecting water compared to 6 million hours spent by men. In some countries, it is not unusual for a woman may spend three, four or five hours each day, every day, collecting water.

In many communities women must also walk a long distance to use toilet facilities, often risking their personal safety. There is an increased incidence of sexual and physical assault for women when toilets are in a remote location. Girls, particularly after puberty and after the onset of menses, miss school due to lack of proper sanitary facilities.

The Special Rapporteur correctly recognizes that structural gender inequalities have an inevitable impact on the enjoyment of the rights to water and sanitation, and as such it is vital that States take transformative approaches that challenge social norms, gender stereotypes and intra-household patterns. In addition, we believe that States should design, adopt and implement gender-responsive and human rights-based law, policy and programming on water and sanitation, and which specifically:

* reflects international human rights standards related to women’s rights to water and sanitation and a gender-responsive understanding of the rights;
* ensures accountability for violations of women’s rights to water and sanitation;
* facilitates women’s empowerment, by creating awareness of women’s rights to water and sanitation;
* prioritizes the needs of particularly marginalized women, including Indigenous women, disabled women, elderly women, women affected by HIV, and urban poor and rural women;
* ensures that implementation of gender -responsive programming is adequately supported with financial and human resources; and
* provides for the collection of gender-sensitive and gender-disaggregated data which can serve as a tool for evaluation and measurement of women’s actual enjoyment of their rights to water and sanitation.

Thank you.

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