



**Input to the Thematic Report to the 78th session of the UN General Assembly
"The rights to water and sanitation as a tool for peace, prevention and cooperation"**

May 26, 2023

PÊL – Civil Waves, a Syrian organization with years of experiences in working on peace building and environment protection was working in the last years on analyzing and documenting the impact of the conflict on the environment and the social cohesion in northeast Syria.

In this submission of input to the thematic report by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to water and sanitation, PÊL elaborates on the complex interrelation between water resources and conflict, based on the experiences we collected through our work in last ten years in northeast Syria. PÊL is also focusing on key challenges the local communities are facing regarding the use and management of transboundary water resources and provide recommendations for policy efforts to improve protection and management of water ecosystems in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

We organized our input to the UN report on water resources based on the list of questions/information the Special Rapporteur prepared.

1. Please present examples of good or promising practices that highlight how transboundary cooperation can support the realization of human rights to water and sanitation.

In the case of northern and eastern Syria, we can talk about rivers whose source is from Turkey, such as: Euphrates River, Khabur, Jaqjak (in the governorate of Hasaka) and Tigris.

Some of the best practices are:

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- Removal of sewage, factory waste and other pollutants from the rivers.
 - Preventing irregular extraction by landowners on the banks of those rivers.
 - Preserving the biodiversity along the above-mentioned rivers.
 - Enhancing (joint) cooperation between actors across borders to conserve water resources and equitably distribute water shares among countries.
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2. How has water cooperation (transboundary, subnational, local) helped overcome conflicts and limit the stress on water systems and water-related infrastructure?

Unfortunately, cooperation is still at very low levels, and the conflict has exacerbated this situation due to the absence of accountability and the chaos of indiscriminate investment of available water resources by some groups at the expense of others.

3. Please provide examples of successful dialogue, mediation and collaboration in transboundary water management that incorporates a human rights perspective and promotes peace, including but not limited to:
- a. Cooperation frameworks: agreements and bodies for shared management and planning in transboundary basins, etc.
 - b. Monitoring and management of shared resources.
 - c. Collaborative consultation and decision-making processes.
 - d. Tools and resources to facilitate equitable water governance and tools or resources for basin-wide water security.
 - e. Strategies and measures to protect the right to health or prevent flood or drought risks, sharing information systems, early warning and flood management, and shared drought strategies.

4. What are some of the main challenges that right holders, civil society organizations and communities face in accessing and managing water resources in transboundary water ecosystems, and what strategies can effectively address these challenges?

There are many challenges that societies face to obtain their rights guaranteed by international agreements regarding transboundary waters.

In northeastern Syria, more than a million people in the city of Hasaka and its countryside suffer from water cuts by Turkey and the groups associated with it.

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- climatic changes, especially the drought conditions that pass through the region due to the lack of rain, which led to a decline in the annual average rainfall of 200 mm in the last three years, which exacerbated the water crisis in the region.
 - Poor management of water resources and failure to invest part of the water stored in dams in a scientific manner, as there is a weakness in the use of modern technologies and irrigation systems that help preserve water resources.
 - Poor user culture and weak awareness of the importance of water and combating waste and depletion.
 - The challenges of pollution appear clearly in the running water systems and the Siliyah Valleys, which have turned into estuaries for sewage, industrial and oil waste.
 - The existence of poor dilapidated and old water transmission systems and drinking water networks that are constantly broken. A lot of water is lost annually due to poor modernization and maintenance of networks due to the lack of resources and equipment needed for repair.
 - The Turkish state controls the sources of the main rivers and builds dams, which exceeded the 579 dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, thus greatly encroaching on the share of the regions of north and east Syria.
 - The Turkish-backed armed factions' seizure of the Alouk water station, which supplies the city of Hasakah and its environs with potable water, depriving more than 800,000 civilians of fresh water.
 - Absence of accountability and accountability due to the existing conflict.
 - The absence of community awareness because of the repercussions of the conflict for more than 12 years.

- The lack of sufficient financial resources for organizations to promote appropriate interventions in providing water resources to conflict-affected communities.
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Some strategies that can address the challenges:

- Raising awareness of the importance and scarcity of water, and the need to preserve it by all necessary means and techniques.
- International pressure on countries at the sources of transboundary rivers to ensure the rights of citizens to access the quantities of water guaranteed by international agreements.
- Providing the necessary infrastructure for storing, sterilizing, and transporting water with the required efficiency and quality in accordance with national standards and standards.
- Switching to modern irrigation systems and building the capacities of farmers on how to optimally invest water and supporting related water projects in this regard.
- Submitting general, comprehensive, and periodic reports on behalf of civil society organizations on all Turkish state violations of the laws and charters regulating international waters to United Nations bodies and organizations, the European Union, and international human rights and humanitarian organizations.
- Calling on the international community in a sustainable manner to put pressure on the Turkish state to back down from its policy and its violation of the laws governing shared international waters.
- Contributing to filing a lawsuit against Turkey for its violation of public international law, international norms, and bilateral and tripartite agreements, to which it previously adhered, about the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and its use of water as a weapon of war, in violation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949.
- Neutralizing water resources from political conflicts and depriving civilians and creating an international mechanism to supervise and ensure the flow of fresh water from Alouk station, which is controlled by the Syrian armed factions under the name of the (National Army) and supported by Turkey.
- Strengthening accounting and accountability mechanisms in cooperation and coordination with local authorities and communities, and legalizing water within the frameworks of good governance adopted in accordance with the international approach.
- Enhancing community awareness by designing programs and tools to rationalize water use.
- Finding sustainable ways to flow the financial resources required for the organizations to promote appropriate interventions in providing water resources to the affected communities.
- Capacity development and training of organizations and local administration in the field of water resources management.

- Enhancing communication between countries and organizations concerned with water to improve the management of shared water resources.
- Encourage rights holders and civil society organizations to actively participate in decision-making processes related to water and sanitation issues.

5. What participation, access to information, and transparency measures could be promoted to involve rights holders, communities, civil society organizations and women in possible dynamics of dialogue, negotiation, and decision-making on transboundary ecosystems management?

- Intensive media activity and continuous awareness targeting decision makers, concerned institutions, citizens, and international actors on the necessity of securing water for rights holders.
 - Advocacy campaigns to promote the rights of beneficiaries to water through dialogue and negotiation, and to revive and respect signed agreements.
 - Providing databases, information, and live testimonies of water access rights violations.
 - Preparing long-term strategic plans considering climatic changes and drought conditions.
 - Providing safe spaces between affected communities, actors, and decision makers.
 - Strengthening mobilization and advocacy campaigns for participation and transparency in obtaining information.
 - Strengthening local governance.
 - Providing information, reports and studies on water resources and water infrastructure, and informing the local community of this information.
 - Promote awareness of the importance of water resources and the rights of residents to access water and participate in decision-making.
 - Enhancing transparency in decision-making processes and making them relevant to the local community, with the need for effective participation of women in making these decisions and encouraging them to participate.
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6. What measures are in place to prevent water pollution and avoid impacts on downstream communities and countries?

- Sustainably clean riverbeds.
 - Planting trees around rivers.
 - Preserving biodiversity and ecology along the riverbeds.
 - Preventing the extension of sewage networks and throwing industrial and other waste into rivers.
 - Issuance of strict laws from local authorities about causing pollution of water resources.
 - Accountability and accountability of those responsible for the pollution of water resources by the concerned authorities.
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7. How can public and private entities be held accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities in transboundary water management?

- Forming working groups to manage rivers and contribute to achieving justice in distribution and investment and preventing encroachments and violations.
 - Benefiting from expertise and consultants specialized in water management and not linking it to specific parties in its management.
 - Establishing meetings and dialogues or a forum that constitutes a space for dialogue and pressure towards assuming responsibilities.
 - Applying local governance and the principle of community participation, forming community pressure groups that follow up steps to implement accountability, as well as giving an active role to the media to shed light on deficiencies and push and motivate public opinion, as well as the judicial and executive authorities to expedite accountability procedures.
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8. How have effective responsibilities and priorities among the various types of uses and users been implemented to prevent water stress (because of water quality, quantity, and ecosystem health)? What are some of the good and promising practices and strategies to promote sustainable management of transboundary ecosystems, prioritize and secure the human rights to water and sanitation and/or prevent potential conflicts?

9. How have transboundary water issues, such as disputes over water allocation, water quality, infrastructure development and environmental impacts, contributed to violence, social unrest, conflicts, and/or displacement in your region or community?

- Conflicts and the difficulty of accessing water caused the displacement or migration of people from dry areas to areas that provide more water. This also caused a change in the patterns of economic and ecological activities practiced by the population, such as rain-fed agriculture and livestock raising, as farmers left their lands and turned to more income-generating activities such as trade, employment, and others.
- The conflicts in Sere Kani / Ras al-Ain regions also contributed to depriving citizens of the practice of agriculture after the armed groups took control of most of the agricultural lands and began to invest them in their favor.
- At the same time, the areas of the military front, which were subject to a third party, such as international observers, were areas where the exploitation of agricultural land and water resources was prohibited.
- Various examples can be listed here and in several different areas:
- About the oil-associated water south of the Rumailan region, particularly in the Gerziero station, this water led to groundwater pollution in the villages where the riverbed passes and caused the death of livestock there. There were also cases of deformed births, in addition to the emergence of skin diseases and abortions of pregnant women. There is also pollution of the surrounding agricultural soil, and all of this has caused a scarcity of fresh water and consequently the occurrence of waves of displacement from those areas to urban areas.
- The stoppage of the Alouk station and the deprivation of hundreds of thousands of civilians and displaced persons in the city of Hasaka and its environs caused the local population to resort to digging surface wells (salty

and non-potable water) in the city and its suburbs randomly, causing damage to the infrastructure and decreasing the quotas of individuals of fresh water.

- Dependence on mobile, unsafe, unclean, and unsanitary tanks, all of which led to the spread of digestive diseases, poisoning cases, and cholera in the recent period, and the displaced were the most affected. All of this has led to community conflicts over access to water.
- The decrease in the Euphrates water level due to the intentional water retention by the Turkish side caused a decline in the generating capacity of electricity, and consequently damage to the health, industrial, commercial and infrastructure sectors, in addition to damage to the vital, environmental, and agricultural system on the Syrian side because of severe water scarcity.

10. How have insufficient water and sanitation services contributed to violence, social unrest, conflicts, and/or displacement in your region or community?

- Many conflicts occurred due to access to water considering the scarcity of water, and there were many complaints related to water issues and the share of individuals and families in it.
 - Many cases of exploitation and abuse have emerged between residents and owners of water transport tanks in the city of Hasaka to obtain drinking water (for example).
 - Water scarcity and the decline in sanitation services have caused disputes between the local population themselves over water shares and between the local population and the suppliers of those services, whether from the public or private sector, either because of the quality of the service provided or because of the high costs of those services compared to the living conditions and the quality of the service itself.
 - The displaced had the largest share of cases of violence and social unrest due to the gender sensitivity in the camps in general and the low level or lack thereof of such services.
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11. To what extent is climate change affecting water-related conflict in your transboundary river basin (interstate, sub-national, and local)?

12. How are local authorities included in the prevention, responses to crises and conflict resolution processes?

Through rehabilitation, empowerment, and capacity-building in the areas of prevention and response, and in coordination with organizations working in the field of development, and, through dialogue, cooperation, coordination, and communication with the concerned parties, such as Iraq, organizations, and international powers, given that the issue of water is primarily a humanitarian issue.

13. How are affected communities included in the prevention, responses to crises and conflict resolution processes?

Through applying the principle of community participation, building trust between them and the local authorities, and providing safe spaces for meaningful community

dialogue, and through rehabilitation, empowerment, and capacity building in the areas of prevention and response, and in coordination with organizations working in the field of development.

14. What role have women been given in dealing with cross-border conflicts?
15. What measures exist in contingency plans, whether during peace, conflict, or post-conflict scenarios, to ensure that priority is given to household water supply and water for domestic and personal use?

16. Please present examples and/or good/promising practices of transboundary water management measures that support the realization of human rights to water and sanitation.

- By contributing to motivating local authorities and pushing them to draw up long-term strategies and policies.
 - Work on building sewage treatment plants and using alternative energy methods (wind and solar).
 - Developing serious and binding programs for rationalization and raising awareness of the different uses of water, in partnership and coordination between local authorities, research centers and civil society organizations.
 - Contribute to the establishment of study centers specialized in water security.
 - Focusing on the necessity of preserving the cleanliness of running water, and following it up by the competent local authorities, and developing programs and policies that rationalize and deter individuals, groups, companies, and institutions that do not adhere to hygiene standards in and near river basins, and for groundwater as well.
 - Work on designing and planning a comprehensive and in-depth study of the human, economic and water resources in the region, and employing them for the requirements of development in its various directions, especially those related to water, its sources, and methods of management.
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17. How can a shift from a focus on water as a resource, which encourages competition for control and ownership, to an ecosystem management approach that involves collaboration and shared responsibility, be promoted in transboundary basins?
18. How are climate change agreements and transboundary water management agreements being interconnected to address the challenges of managing water resources in shared aquatic ecosystems?

19. What are some of the most promising examples of collaborative efforts between governments (national and local), civil society organizations, communities, individuals and/or private sector in promoting sustainable water management, including pollution reduction and ecosystem protection, in the context of transboundary waters?

There is currently a project to revive rivers in the regions of northern and eastern Syria. The Jaqjaq River project in the city of Qamishli is a practical example and a first experience of the fruit of cooperation between local authorities and organizations

working in the field of development and civil society, where the project will be implemented in the following way:

The northern and first section, which extends for (150 meters), will be an experience and a display for guests, visitors, and organizations.

The second section - north to Karaj Nowruz Bridge and will be long and expensive (two wells will be drilled). A management of the river will be set up in cooperation with the Local Administration and Environment Authority to follow up on the status of the river for the sake of sustainability.

The third section - between the two bridges (treatment of the river), its length is about (40 m), both sides of the river can be invested in this section to create a garden with public terraces, and in this way the river will be transformed from its beginning into a garden, and reeds, poplars and lilies will be planted in addition to breeding some suitable types of animals.

The technical and engineering supervision will be by an organization working in the field of environment and sustainable development. The project will serve a high population segment, serving approximately 500,000 people. And it will be in parallel, meaning that all stages will be accomplished together and in coordination with the supervising authority and the executing authorities.

Submitted by:

- PÊL- Civil Waves