**Special Rapporteur on the human rights**

**to safe drinking water and sanitation**

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**STATEMENT**

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**Thematic Report: Human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation of impoverished rural communities.**

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This report aims to identify the water and sanitation problems suffered by rural communities and highlight the lessons they offer us based on the traditional peasant cultures they keep alive.

After the Second World War, the so-called green revolution imposed a new production model, separating agriculture from livestock farming and promoting mechanisation, using standard seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. Those who could not finance these investments migrated en masse to the cities, while in the less productive territories, people survived by preserving traditional peasant ways of life and knowledge

Yet today, 44% of the world's population is rural, including 80% of the 2 billion people without safe drinking water, two-thirds of the nearly 4 billion without safe sanitation and 92% of the 500 million who still defecate in the open.

Rural poverty is often seen as part of progress. However, peasant and small farmer production not only feed 70% of the world's population but also, as Via Campesina advocates, peasant cultures offer us valuable lessons to face the necessary agro-ecological transition towards food systems that reconcile human health, social well-being and sustainability based on integrated agricultural practices of circular economy, an agro-ecological transition that the FAO itself is beginning to recognise and promote

These communities depend directly on the natural network of aquifers, rivers, lakes and wetlands from which they obtain water, and even fish, as the key to their livelihoods in many cases. In the absence of public investment in basic infrastructure, communities are often supplied with untreated water from public sources, community-managed wells, private wells, vendors with tanker trucks, or directly from springs, rivers or lakes.

On the other hand, the irruption of mining, hydroelectric, agricultural and industrial companies in their territories breaks the principle of availability due to overexploitation and contamination of their sources; the lack of infrastructure forces women and girls to seek water from distant sources, breaking the principle of accessibility; extreme poverty breaks the principle of affordability, as the communities themselves cannot make the necessary investments or cover basic costs; and the lack of information, training and dialogue with the communities leads to the rejection of required measures, such as water treatment.

But it is perhaps in sanitation that the most significant challenges are faced. The lack of priority in public policies, cultural taboos, lack of information and training, and the costs, not only to ensure safe and decent sanitation but also to sanitise returns and prevent contamination of drinking water, hindering the development of sanitation, which is essential for the health of communities.

From the information received, there is no doubt that community water management, typical of peasant cultures, offers the most positive examples to follow. The 80,000 Community Aqueducts in Latin America, serving some 70 million people in impoverished rural areas, show a reference in this respect.

Unfortunately, peasant cultures are often weakened by the growing influence of private ownership, leading to self-supply systems for those who can build private wells.

While more and more countries recognise in their constitutions the human right to safe drinking water, certainly not to sanitation, there is a need for rights-based legislation and budgetary commitments to strengthen rural community water and sanitation systems.

Rural municipalities, with the insufficient allocation of resources, often marginalise community authorities in the villages under their responsibility. Some governments, which consider community management inefficient, centralise and even privatise rural water management, aggravating the vulnerability of the most impoverished.

Faced with the increasing risks of drought and flooding due to climate change, it is urgent to promote rural adaptation strategies that require not only public funding but also the active participation of communities. A good example is in the Brazilian Sertao, where ASA, a network of some 700 organisations, took on the challenge of building 1 million rainwater cisterns for 5 million people, with public funding, community work and education.

In recent decades, as with indigenous peoples, the grabbing of community lands by large agro-livestock producers has left many communities without water and resources; others have been displaced by the construction of large dams, while mining destroys their territories pollutes their water.

People's legitimate opposition to these projects often leads to criminalisation, repression and even the murder of community leaders. Global Witness has recorded almost 2,000 such cases in the last decade.

The obligation of governments to guarantee the human rights of rural communities to safe drinking water and sanitation cannot be excused by arguing scarcity problems. In contrast, powerful, productive interests, which do not lack water, are prioritised. Nor is it acceptable to argue a lack of economic resources when these human rights are not prioritised in public budgets. At the same time, expenses such as those of the launch of the new arms race are assumed.

In conclusion, Excellencies, I would like to stress the need for governments to support community management as an expression of democratic governance that leaves no one behind, promoting public-community strategies and partnerships; they should promote the participation of women in decision-making on an equal footing with men; and they should promote compliance with the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, paying particular attention to climate change in rural areas through participatory adaptation plans based on a human rights approach