

“Water for Peace”

WORLD WATER DAY 22 MARCH 2024



UN Photo/Mark Naftalin

World Water Day is an annual United Nations [UN] observance that goes back to December 1992 when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to observe a day on which countries throughout the world focus on the importance of fresh water. The first World Water Day was observed 31 years ago on 22 March 1993 under the theme **“Water for Life”**.

Since that first World Water Day in 1993, the UN’s agency responsible for the coordination of its work on water and sanitation – **UN-Water** – determines the theme for the successive World Water Days. Each World Water Day has to focus on a specific challenge relating to the **GLOBAL WATER CRISIS**.

UN-Water has decided on **“Leveraging Water for Peace”** as the theme for 2024. However, the World Water Day campaign is simply called **“Water for Peace”**. The intention of the theme is twofold:

1. to raise global awareness on how water can be a channel of peace or be the reason for strife and conflict in communities or between countries;
2. to encourage action to tackle the various global water crises.

This is especially necessary wherever people have unequal access to clean and safe water, or denied access to clean and safe water.

The UN-Water Summary Progress Update of 2021 sheds some light on the scale of unequal access to clean and safe water:

“More than 3 billion people worldwide depend on water that crosses national borders. Yet, out of 153 countries that share rivers, lakes and aquifers with their neighbours, only 24 countries report having cooperation agreements for all their shared water.”

To read the UN-Water Summary Progress Update of 2021, use the following link: <https://www.unwater.org/publications/summary-progress-update-2021-sdg-6-water-and-sanitation-all>.



We are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom, illustrated by Michaela Goade (2020) / Indigenous American creators

Why is the theme for 2024 “water for peace”? How can water bring about peace?

Throughout known history, in all parts of the world, difficulties with access to drinking water has led to conflict between peoples. This has been, and indeed still is the case where peoples depend on drinking water from shared sources such as aquifers, rivers or lakes. Tensions - to the point of warfare – are exacerbated when a (more) powerful neighbour or community can determine how much or indeed whether the less powerful or powerless neighbour / community can have access to drinking water.

Yet access to drinking water is an inalienable human right. Nonetheless, it requires considerable awareness raising mechanisms and action – both locally and globally – for the recognition of this inalienable human right to gain universal traction.

How does one go about ‘leveraging’ water for peace?

First of all, there has to be agreement that access to drinking water is an inherent human right for ALL people. Without sustained access to drinking water people will take ill and inevitably die. Predictably, this will lead to serious social tensions and great unrest.

Secondly, there has to be the understanding that the lack of access to life-giving water will certainly lead to conflict. Conflict is the opposite of peace because it entails the absence of justice regarding access to safe drinking water.

Thirdly, it must be accepted that only non-discriminatory and equal access to drinking water will have a conflict-free effect across all sectors of society, as peaceful working together around equal access to drinking water will certainly spill over into other sectors of society.

Fourthly, 'leveraging' water for peace is an open invitation for civil society to actively advocate and agitate for water justice at local levels. And to live and act in solidarity with vulnerable populations.

Finally, inform yourself! To access "**Water for Peace**" World Water Day 2024 Fact Sheet, use the link: <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/water-and-peace>