

2026 United Nations Water Conference
Template for Interactive Dialogue Concept Papers
Interactive Dialogue 1 - Water for People

I. Introduction (500 words)

In response to the letter DESA-25/01358 by the Under-Secretary-General LI Junhua on 20 August 2025, the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflict sends its contribution to the concepts and panels of the Interactive Dialogues for the 2026 UN Water Conference.

The Global Alliance is a cross-regional group of countries and organizations, representing Slovenia, Switzerland, Costa Rica, Hungary, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Mozambique, the Philippines, Panama, Senegal, UNICEF, Global WASH Cluster, Geneva Water Hub, Geneva Call and PAX for Peace. The Alliance aims to foster collective action to enhance the protection of water during armed conflicts through good practices, knowledge production, advocacy and partnerships.

The members of the Global Alliance propose including the topics of survival and resilient WASH in the interactive dialogue 1: Water for People. As these issues intersect with climate resilience, peacebuilding, crisis governance, and financing mechanisms, we suggest considering this submission in all six Interactive Dialogues. The aim is to raise awareness about the urgent need to ensure immediate access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene services in humanitarian settings to save lives, and to explore strategies for addressing these challenges such as enhancing the resilience of WASH during peacetime.

II. Status and trends (1000 words)

With 120 active armed conflicts across the globe, water is under attack and the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation denied to millions of civilians. Children in armed conflicts are 20 times more likely to die of water-borne diseases than bullets.¹ The consequences of attacks on water system personnel, damaged or destroyed water facilities and infrastructure, including by explosive weapons in populated areas can set back decades

¹ UNICEF, 'Water Under Fire [Volume 3] - Attacks on water and sanitation services in armed conflict and the impacts on children', 2021.

of developmental gains and have long-lasting detrimental consequences to the health of humans and the environment.

157.9 million people need humanitarian WASH assistance in 2025. Only 22.7 million received it. \$3.2 billion is requested for 2025, with only 10% of funding received so far, making WASH the least funded humanitarian sector (OCHA FTS).

III. Challenges and emerging issues (2000 words): This section will highlight challenges and opportunities relating to the topics addressed in the interactive dialogue, particularly those that have emerged or become more urgent since the 2023 Water Conference. This section will also identify interlinkages and synergies between the relevant SDG 6 targets and other SDGs.

Destruction, disruption, and denial – sometimes deliberate – of water and sanitation access and services, as well as the pollution of freshwater sources, have become a regular occurrence in armed conflicts. These acts are depriving millions of civilians of water – a basic means of survival, health, dignity, and livelihoods.

The impacts on the provision of water, namely on freshwater resources and related infrastructure, particularly in urban areas can be devastating. Dehydration, food insecurity and malnutrition, waterborne diseases, displacement, deprivation of healthcare and education – all have long-lasting and well-documented humanitarian consequences, particularly on children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Beyond immediate humanitarian concerns, the lack of protection and deliberate destruction or degradation of water and sanitation systems and related infrastructure can constitute violations of international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights, including the right to life, and jeopardizes prospects for sustainable development and peace.

In protracted armed conflicts, impacts can accumulate and lead to pernicious cycles of degradation, loss of decades of developmental gains, reduced community resilience, as well as hinder post-conflict peacebuilding. Attacks on freshwater resources and related infrastructure can intensify local grievances, fuel instability, and consequently pose threats to regional and international peace and security.

Lack of reliable baseline data, in particular epidemiological, remains a considerable challenge in terms of assessments, program design, and monitoring and evaluation of impact, particularly impact of disruption of essential services on the population.

Despite progress, gaps in the humanitarian / development divide are persistent and traditional models of aid still have to be adapted.

- IV. **Solutions** (2000 words): This section will offer action-oriented, innovative, and pragmatic solutions to challenges. It will shine a spotlight on impactful initiatives, programs and projects from around the world that can be scaled up and/or transferred to other contexts. Potential partnerships among Member States and with other stakeholders will feature prominently.

The human rights to water and to sanitation continue to apply in times of war. Respect for humanitarian principles and effective implementation of the International Humanitarian Law are essential obligations of all states and parties to the conflict. They solidify peaceful outcomes.

Raising awareness on the protective nature of IHL and promoting better understanding of the impacts of attacks can help reduce the gap between the legal frameworks and compliance.

Protection of WASH in humanitarian settings requires strong commitment and sustained collaboration among diverse partners and actors from the peace, development, and humanitarian communities. It enhances resilience of water systems in contexts of continued, recurrent, or emerging armed conflict.

Innovative technologies and private sector partnerships can play a transformative role in facilitating access and protecting and delivering WASH services in conflict settings. Encouraging innovation and investment from private actors can enhance resilience, scalability, and sustainability of WASH interventions. New financing models, e.g., humanitarian blended finance, new models of bonds, loans and grants, etc. should be explored.

V. **Recommendations and conclusions** (2000 words)

- Continue to ensure that humanitarian action and financing provides timely and dignified access to sufficient and safe water services for people caught in humanitarian crises.
- Consider including the promotion of financing models that can support more effectively the delivery of SDG and allow to concretize the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

- Local and national responders must be supported through predictable, flexible financing and integrated coordination platforms.
- In fragile and conflict settings, prioritize WASH responses and coordination in areas with highest risks and needs and reaffirm compliance with humanitarian principles.
- Support WASH implementation worldwide and underline the importance of building on existing frameworks and tools such as the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health.
- Beyond the question of access, the impact of conflict on water systems must inform interventions that are sustainable beyond short-term measures, by ensuring they are closely linked to mediation efforts and support to shared governance of key natural resources such as land and water.
- Advocate for better protection of water before, during, and after armed conflict, ensuring its safeguarding through the effective enforcement, of international humanitarian law, the human rights to water and to sanitation, and the core principles of humanitarian action.
- Advocate for an “essential service approach” rather than an “infrastructure-centric” one so as to include capacity, access, and consumables.
- Recognize the protection of the natural environment in conflict as key in the protection of water.
- Support initiatives aimed at strengthening compliance with International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law and the delivery of humanitarian outcomes such as ICRC Global IHL Initiative, Global WASH Cluster, Sanitation and Water for All, and the Global Alliance for Sparing Water from Armed Conflicts.
- Support WASH Roadmap Call to Action, urging strengthened humanitarian principles, conflict-sensitive coordination, evidence-based prioritization (e.g. through the WASH Insecurity Analysis), and protection of WASH systems and personnel.
- Call on the UN Security Council to recognize the link between attacks against water and the negative impact on international peace and security, restate the protection offered to water resource and related infrastructure by the International Humanitarian Law; to systematically incorporate the protection of water into the consideration of the items on its agenda; support UN-led documentation efforts by integrating water-related violations into existing humanitarian reporting systems; work with the UN system and the humanitarian actors to address the immediate, long-term, and cumulative impact of attacks on freshwater resources and related infrastructure; the impact on vulnerable populations including children, regularly follow the violations; and provide recommendations for preventive action.

VI. **Guiding questions** (1000 words)

- How to make sure that humanitarian and development assistance as well as climate finance reaches those in fragile and conflict settings?
- Are traditional approaches, and associated financing, adequate for contexts of fragility, conflict and violence? How could they be optimized and further developed to become more effective, sustainable and inclusive of local capacities?
- How can fragile, conflict-affected, and displaced populations be adequately considered in WASH planning?
- How to link WASH responses in emergencies to long-term development and sustainable outcomes?
- What policies and partnerships are needed to safeguard and strengthen the resilience of water and sanitation infrastructure in conflict-affected settings, so that services can withstand shocks, support recovery, and contribute to sustainable peace?
- How can WASH responses in conflict-affected settings be adapted to address pollution caused by conflict—such as contamination of freshwater sources from damaged infrastructure, explosives, or hazardous materials—while ensuring climate-resilient, safe, and sustainable services for affected communities?
- How to ensure better compliance with International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in armed conflicts? How to reverse the trend of normalization of deliberate attacks on WASH infrastructure in armed conflicts?