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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The human right to safe drinking water in Ethiopia

Elizka Relief Foundation is deeply concerned about the Ethiopians lack of access to safe drinking water, undermining several human rights, of which the most important is the right to life.

The right to safe drinking water in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is the second most populous nation in Africa. However, tens of millions of people in Ethiopia are still relying on contaminated drinking water. Clean water scarcity contributes to the spread of many infectious diseases, especially in light of the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic.

In reality, about 7 million people in Ethiopia lack access to safe drinking water.¹ Statistics reveal that only 42% of people in Ethiopia have access to clean water. Of that 42 percent, only 11% of the population have access to sanitation services. In rural areas, around 69% of the population lack access to water, and about 96% lack access to sanitation services.² This, in turn, affects public health levels. Polluted water, coupled with lack of basic sanitation, make up about 60-80% of infectious diseases, as indicated by statistics.³

The success of the country in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6), on “the right to clean drinking water and sanitation” cannot be judged only by knowing the percentage of people having access to clean drinking water. There are several other criteria to be taken into account, for example measuring the impact of urbanization, industrialization and rapid population growth on rivers and surface water quality. In fact, Ethiopia is one of the low income countries facing the consequence of improper waste management practices. Rivers in Addis Ababa, including the Big and Little Akaki Rivers, receive large part of the waste generated by the city. About 65% of Ethiopian industry is concentrated along the banks of the river. In addition, 90% of these industries discharge their waste to nearby river, lakes and streams, negatively impacting the marine ecosystems. It also threatens the lives of people relying on these rivers as their main source of water.⁴

In February 2020, in Ethiopia's Somali regional state located in the eastern part of the country, specifically near the natural gas pipeline project that China is constructing in the region, villagers have reported cases of chemical poisoning attributed to the contaminated rivers.

The villages near to the Chinese natural gas project are dying from a "mysterious epidemic" blamed on toxic waste generated from a Chinese oil project in the country's east. As with the increase of cases, doctors claimed there is a direct correlation between the number of reported cases in each village and its proximity to the gas wells at Calub and elsewhere in the Ogaden Basin. The Chinese company, Poly-GCL, which is partly state-owned, has been prospecting oil and gas in Ogaden since 2014.⁵ Despite multiple deaths and local's statements, there are still denials over the connection between the extraction and the serious illness in the area, and the government asserts that this epidemic has repercussions other than water pollution and the natural gas project.⁶

A gold mine in Ethiopia's most populous and restive region, Oromia, has been anything but a blessing. Residents claim that contamination from the mine has led to disastrous health problems. As the chemicals used to process gold at the open-pit mine near Shakiso, 222 miles south of the capital, Addis Ababa, have polluted water streams and the air, causing humans and animals respiratory illnesses, miscarriages, birth defects and disabilities. Meanwhile,

¹ United Nations Children's Fund, Ethiopia, link: <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/ethiopia.html>.

² Clean water charity, Ethiopia, May 2020, link: <https://bit.ly/2PI36Jc>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Worldwater & Solar Technologies, Covid-19: Ethiopia Stares At Water Crisis, 7 May 2020, link : <https://bit.ly/3fQkeHk>.

⁵ 7 news, Ethiopian villagers dropping dead from mystery illness some blame on Chinese oil project, 2 March 2020, Link : <https://bit.ly/31HAvcM>.

⁶ The Guardian, The mystery sickness bringing death and dismay to eastern Ethiopia, 20 February 2020 , link: <https://bit.ly/3isZ6Zy>.

residents say there were no warnings about potential toxins in the water nor were environmental audits showing cyanide and high levels of mercury in the water and the soil.⁷

Recommendations

Elizka Relief Foundation recommends the following:

- Working to increase rural reconstruction programs, especially in marginalized areas such as the eastern Somali region, to ensure providing adequate water supply and proper sanitation services for families living in these areas.
 - Carrying out accurate environmental studies to examine the impact of industrial projects, whether carried out by the Ethiopian government or by a foreign investor, which negatively affect the health and environmental status of the local population.
 - The geographical redistribution of major industrial projects that are located near waterways or densely populated areas
 - Launching periodic campaigns to check and sanitize waterways that are exposed, one way or another, to toxic chemical waste.
 - The relevant authorities in the Ethiopian interior should carefully consider the cases of those affected by the contaminated water or those suffering from waterborne diseases and poor sanitation services.
 - Improving the quality and quantity of water, as well as the health care provided to detainees and prisoners, including children and pregnant women, and those with HIV and tuberculosis.
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⁷ In Depth News, Ethiopian Gold Mine Leaves Deadly Toxic Waste Trail in Prime Minister's Home Town, 14 June 2020, link : <https://bit.ly/2Cgn9ve>.