



Pivotal step: Recognition of the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation at the UN

New York, 29 July 2010 – Founding President Mikhail Gorbachev of Green Cross International (GCI) said “the actions and voices of millions of citizens have brought the global movement for the right to water this far. I hope that more people will join us to help bring us closer to the ultimate goal — a world where everyone’s right to safe water and sanitation is not just recognized but is also fulfilled.”

The 3rd Commission of the 64th General Assembly of the United Nations made history yesterday by overwhelmingly adopting a resolution proclaiming the Human Right to Safe drinking Water and Sanitation. Presented by Bolivia and 33 other States, the resolution received 122 votes in favour with no votes against and 41 abstentions.

At least 4,000 children die every day from water related diseases. “This vote recognizing safe water and sanitation as a human right is an important step to save these lives. Safe water supplies and sanitation are the primary conditions for life, health, education and economic livelihood. Promoting the fulfilment of vital human needs such as access to water is also a means to promote stability and reduce conflicts” says Marie-Laure Vercambre, GCI Water Programme Leader. Concerned about security, environment and poverty, GCI’s water programme addresses the nexus between these three areas to ensure a safe future for humanity.

GCI welcomes the passing of this resolution as a major step towards provision of access to clean water and sanitation for all. Water is scarce and a finite resource under pressure due to human activity, demographics and climate change. GCI, behind the leadership of Founding President Mikhail Gorbachev, has been advocating for the Right to water since the idea was first developed a decade ago. This campaign successfully raised awareness at the global and national levels. Green Cross national organisations contributed to sensitizing elected officials to the Right in their respective countries. Civil society played a major role in these endeavours in France for instance, where the Right to water was recognized in 2006.

“Recognizing water as a human right is a critical step, but it is not an instant “silver bullet” solution. This right must be enshrined in national laws, and upholding it must be a top priority” says Gorbachev.

The resolution that was just adopted “declares the Right to Safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”

Whereas another UN resolution on the ‘right to development’ had set a precedent by acknowledging the Right to food and to clean water 10 years ago, this marks the first time a resolution entirely dedicated to the Right to water and sanitation is adopted and by such an important number of countries. It also goes further than the previous resolution by proclaiming sanitation a human right and by clarifying the Right to water.

The abstainers to the vote were mainly developed countries but some developed and newly industrialized countries supported the resolution, including France, Germany,

Spain, Russia, China and Brazil. This, coupled with the fact that no State opposed it, should be seen as a break through.

A resolution has no binding mechanisms attached to it like a Convention or a protocol would. However, it carries tremendous political weight, enough to provoke harsh negotiations between States, to help advance key issues on the international agenda and to trigger national endorsements. The 15th ordinary session of the Human Rights Council might provide a platform for further debate in September.

About Green Cross International

For more information about Gorbachev's editorial on the right to water, please visit www.gci.ch

Green Cross International (GCI) is a leading environmental organisation. Founded by President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993, this non-profit and non-governmental organisation promotes a combination of high level advocacy with key international stakeholders, runs campaigns and manages local projects to address the inter-connected global challenges of security, poverty eradication and environmental degradation. GCI is present in over 30 countries and has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. More information about GCI follow GCI on twitter @GreenCrossInt

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