

[Communication]

## 5 UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS ON HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTION FRANCE AND EXPECT ANSWERS

### RIGHT TO WATER AND WATER CUTS IN GUADELOUPE

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Auteur : Coalition Eau

On 20 July 2021, five UN Special Rapporteurs on human rights<sup>1</sup>, including the Special Rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, [called on the French government](#) to address the issue of water cuts in Guadeloupe and their negative impact on the population's human right to safe drinking water and on several related fundamental rights, including the right to health

**Five human rights violations are highlighted here: violation of the right to water and sanitation, violation of the right to a healthy environment, violation of the right to education, violation of the right to adequate housing, violation of the right to equal protection before the law, access to justice and effective remedies.**

Access to water in this French territory has been problematic **for over 30 years** and has become **a vital issue with the Covid-19 crisis**.

Before the health crisis, **over 60% of the water produced** was already lost due to leaks in the networks. To address the technical failures of the network, daily planned water cuts have been implemented, **affecting some 400,000 people** (170,000 households) and resulting in a breach of the human right to water and sanitation. In addition, **70% of the 27 wastewater treatment plants**<sup>2</sup> do not comply with regulations, resulting in water contamination and health hazards. The water is also polluted with chlordecone, an extremely toxic pesticide, which has even been found in bottled water.

**Since the beginning of the health crisis, the situation keeps worsening:** planned or unannounced water cuts are on the increase, including at the hospital. The consequences are disastrous for the

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<sup>1</sup> Special Rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo; Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Ms. Koumbou Boly Barry; Special Rapporteur on the right to the environment, Mr. David R. Boyd; Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal; Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, Mr. Olivier de Schutter

<sup>2</sup> Source : <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26511>

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population, in terms of health, hygiene and living conditions, especially for the most vulnerable. If back-up tanks have been installed, they may be located far from homes and lead to long queues to fill up jerry cans with non-potable water.

Beyond the socio-economic impact of these water cuts, their **adverse consequences on public institutions**, health services (water cuts and traces of feces in tap water at the hospitals) and education (closure of schools during water cuts) are tremendous.

**The price of this failing service is also problematic:** users can receive water bills amounting up to several thousand euros even though their water has been cut off for long periods of time. Many homes must buy bottled water, which is 32.9% more expensive than in mainland France<sup>3</sup>. These costs are unaffordable for a large part of the population, a third of whom live below the poverty line. These major disparities between Guadeloupe and mainland France call into question the **effective implementation of the [law on genuine equality in French overseas territories](#)** and the development of effective policies against poverty.

Through their communication, the Rapporteurs question the French state on the measures foreseen:

- To **ensure the supply of a minimum vital quantity of water**, on a continuous basis, in order to guarantee the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation
- To **prevent the contamination of water plants**, including by pesticides and wastewater, in order to ensure the full enjoyment of the right to a healthy environment by the whole population
- To **protect children, the elderly, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups** affected by water shortages
- To **reopen schools** and ensure that the right to quality education is not impeded
- To **ensure the affordability of clean water for all**, including those who cannot pay their bills due to reasons beyond their control (unemployment, poverty)
- To **ensure access to justice and redress** for those disconnected from public drinking water services

**This communication was sent on 20 July 2021 and has not yet received a response from the French State. Coalition Eau ('Water Coalition' in English), as a network of French NGOs committed to the human rights to water and sanitation, joins the Special Rapporteurs in this questioning, as well as Guadeloupean the civil society organisations of users mobilised to ensure that their human rights to water and sanitation, to dignity, to education and to health are respected.**

It expects the French government to take strong and urgent measures to make the human rights to water and sanitation effective for all throughout France, including in all territories.

→ [Link to the full communication here](#)

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La Coalition Eau regroupe les principales ONG françaises engagées pour les droits humains à l'eau et à l'assainissement et pour l'eau bien commun.

Sont membres de la Coalition Eau : ACAD · Action contre la Faim · ADEDE · BlueEnergy · CRID · 4D · Dynam'eau · EAST · Eau et Vie · Eau Sans Frontières International · GRDR · GRET · Guinée 44 · Hamap Humanitaire · Human Dignity · Hydraulique Sans Frontières · IDO · Initiative Développement · Kynarou · Morija · Première Urgence Internationale · Secours Catholique – Caritas France · Secours Islamique France · SEVES · Solidarité Eau Europe · Solidarités International · WECF · Wikewater

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<sup>3</sup> Source : <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26511>