



# WATER: ONE OF THE FIRST CASUALTIES OF WAR

## SECONDARY RESOURCES



In July 2010, the United Nations recognized access to clean water as a human right, but in areas of conflict it is often used as a weapon of war. Photo source: Free The Children archives.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- In 1949, following World War II, all countries in the United Nations agreed to a set of laws that govern what is and is not allowed during times of war, particularly with regards to the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war. These rules are known as the “Geneva Conventions.” ([Cornell University Law School](#))
- The Geneva Conventions has been updated several times since 1949. The first such update, in 1977, was called “Protocol I”, and added a list of new rules for protecting victims of international armed conflict. One of those rules, Article 54, states that armies may not deliberately starve civilians, or “attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.” ([International Red Cross](#))
- If an army violates the rules of the Geneva Convention, it is called a war crime. The

International Criminal Court was established in 1998 to prosecute those accused of committing war crimes. ([International Criminal Court](#))

- In 2010, the UN voted to recognize access to clean water and sanitation as a basic human right. The UN defined this right as “the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.” ([United Nations](#))
- Although the UN voted in 2010 to recognize water as a basic human right, the previous Conservative government of Canada refused to recognize this right until 2012. ([Council of Canadians](#))
- In 2014, Ban Ki Moon, the General Secretary of the United Nations, made a public statement expressing deep concern about the increasing use of water resources—depriving civilian populations of access to water and sanitation—as a weapon of war in global conflicts. ([International Press Service](#)) One year later, in 2015, the International Red Cross specifically called attention to the use of water as a weapon of war in the conflict in Syria. ([Al Jazeera](#))

### NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

Core Skill Sets:



These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE.org Learning Framework at [www.weday.com/weschools](http://www.weday.com/weschools).

### KEY TERMS

**Human rights**—Basic rights and freedoms that every person should have, no matter where they live.

**Infrastructure**—Physical structures such as roads or water pipelines, or organizational structures like the justice system, that are needed for the operation of our society.

**Civilian**—A person who is not a member of a military or police force.

## THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- **Themes:** Water, War and Conflict, Values and Ethics, Environment, Health, Human Rights, Activism, Politics, Global Issues
- **Course Connections:** Canadian and World Studies, English, Health and Physical Education Interdisciplinary Studies

## MATERIALS

- Front board
- Paper and writing utensils
- World Map

## SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information
- Participate in active group work and class discussions
- Communicate effectively in writing, orally or visually
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically
- Develop, express and defend a position on an issue

## MAP IT

Have students locate the different regions mentioned in the article to gain an understanding of the expanse and involvement of this issue.

- Syria
- Somalia
- Nigeria
- Afghanistan
- India
- Pakistan
- Mali
- Israel
- Egypt
- Gaza Strip

## DISCUSS

1. What does it mean when the article describes water as a weapon of war? What else is used as a weapon of war? (e.g., oil, food, etc.) Would these be considered necessities of life?
2. What might be the long-term effects of the water-based war tactics listed in the article?
3. Who are the victims when water is used as a weapon of war?
4. Who's responsible for protecting clean water sources and systems?

## DIVE DEEPER

Share with the class the following excerpt from the United Nations *Resolution: The human right to clean water and sanitation*, passed 28 July 2010:

The General Assembly,

*Deeply concerned* that approximately 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water and that more than 2.6 billion do not have access to basic sanitation, and alarmed that

approximately 1.5 million children under 5 years of age die and 443 million school days are lost each year as a result of water-and sanitation-related diseases,

*Acknowledging* the importance of equitable access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as an integral component of the realization of all human rights,

*Reaffirming* the responsibility of States for the promotion and protection of all human rights, which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and must be treated globally, in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis.

Ask students to explain what this excerpt means. Pay particular attention to the significance of the stats and what “equitable access,” “responsibility of States,” and “promotion and protection of all human rights, which are universal” mean.

- What can we do/what does the article ask us to do?

In the *Resolution: The human right to clean water and sanitation*, the UN highlighted the responsibility of member states to protect all human rights, which includes the right to clean water and sanitation. Help students raise awareness of these lesser publicized effects of war to help protect the human right to clean water.

Divide students into groups of three to four students. Ask groups to brainstorm a list of ways to raise awareness. The list may include, but is not limited to: posters, school announcements (video or audio), editorial articles for the school paper, pamphlets, fundraiser, petition, etc.

Have students share their ideas with the class. Then, either have each group select one option or choose one to complete as a class (students may still work in groups creating one of the selected method per group). Discuss ways to amplify their message, gain support and raise awareness.

Next, students should choose the message they want to share and raise awareness of. These messages may include, but are not limited to: the importance of clean water and sanitation for healthy communities, the UN resolution recognizing water as a human right, the use of water as a weapon of war, etc. Again, each group may focus on the message of their choosing or the class may select one message to raise awareness for.

Provide students with some time to research and time to prepare their message and awareness project. Set a completion date. On the due date, have groups present their projects. Then share them in their intended manner, i.e., share the messages on the announcements, with the school newspaper, with the school community, hold the fundraiser or distribute the petition.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- UN Resolution: The human right to clean water and sanitation <http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/64/292&lang=E>
- Free The Children's Clean Water and Sanitation Pillar lessons: <http://cdn.weday.com/files/2015/12/AAVWater-Pillar-Secondary.pdf>