



High Representative of the Union for Foreign
Affairs and Security Policy

Catherine Ashton

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**10 December – Human Rights Day –
Will the EU take action to defend the Human Right to Water and Sanitation**

Dear High Representative, dear Mrs. Ashton,

Our organizations have welcomed the Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton on behalf of the EU to commemorate the World Water Day, 22nd March 2010, expressing support for the Human Right to Water.[1] The declaration states that "on World Water Day, the European Union reaffirms that all States bear human rights obligations regarding access to safe drinking water, which must be available, physically accessible, affordable and acceptable."

The announcement was a positive surprise, following the disappointing lack of support by many EU countries towards the Declaration of Governments for the Human Right to Water issued at the World Water Forum in Istanbul in March 2009. This declaration was supported by 25 governments but unfortunately rejected by virtually all EU governments.[2]

Your statement on World Water Day seemed to signal a different EU approach, but just a few months later a large number of EU government refused to support the United Nations General Assembly resolution A/Res/64/292 titled The Human Right to Water and Sanitation.[3] No less than 17 EU governments abstained from voting. [4] While we were pleased that a large majority of the UN General Assembly adopted the declaration and that several EU Member States supported the position, the lack of unity in support of the right to water at this occasion was very disappointing.

It is on this background that we would like to use the occasion of 10th of December (International Human Rights Day) to ask you for clarification about what the stance of the EU is with regards to the Right to Water. Can we count on the EU as a supporter of the right to water? Legally, the Human Rights Council resolution of September 30th following the General Assembly Resolution makes the human right to water and sanitation legally binding on all Member States which are signatories to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This includes all EU Member States. We suggest that the Commission publishes a clear position on how it intends to implement the human right to water and sanitation in Member States' and EU policy meeting its legal obligation and responsibilities

and to mainstream the human right to water and sanitation in all policies of the EU such as on Poverty and Development for example.

We look forward to hear from you,

Signed by:

- European Federation of Public Service Unions, www.epsu.org
- Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) <http://www.corporateeurope.org/>
- Transnational Institute (TNI) <http://www.tni.org/>
- Food and Water Europe <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/world/europe/>

cc. **Viviane Reding**, Vice-President in charge of Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Contact:

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Notes

1: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/hr/news253.pdf

2: 25 countries, of which Spain was the only EU government, signed this Declaration of Governments for the Human Right of Water, which stated: "We recognize that access to water and sanitation is a human right and we are committed to all necessary actions for the progressive implementation of this right".

3: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/ga10967.doc.htm>

4: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, United Kingdom; <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/ga10967.doc.htm>