



Research Report | GA6

Forum: General Assembly Sixth Committee (Legal)

Issue: Establishing Laws for Transboundary Bodies of Water

Student Officer: Karyssa Alamon | 13-0448@sgen.edu.ph

Position: Deputy Chair

Welcome Letter

The General Assembly's Sixth Committee tackles issues that revolve around the legal sector of the United Nations. This committee sets standards for International law and firmly stands in its place as one of the main committees. The committee aims to improve practices and working methods to achieve protection, peace, and security through strengthening and accelerating multilateral agreements and advocating for diplomacy across all nations.

Background

Shared water disputes have been a repetitive issue between nations both historically and in modern times. Water was and is a source of tension and disagreement in territorial disputes and resource conflicts. A substantial example would be the lengthy history of the Nile River. The 10-year conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia over water supply has caused controversy. With Egypt relying on the Nile River to source more than 90% of its overall water supply and Ethiopia's construction of a Dam that Egypt claims would disrupt its water supply, a resolve between the two countries is yet to be found.



The pressing subject of water scarcity has caused economic and humanitarian issues to arise. Water plays a crucial role in agriculture, industry, business and energy which are essentials for economic development. Water productivity heightens agricultural products and with productivity in the energy, industry and business sectors, job creation also becomes one of its benefits. Yet, job displacement is not the only humanitarian issue. Water scarcity could potentially prompt the denial of access to transboundary waters which as a result infringes upon a human's right to clean and accessible water as well as significantly influences vulnerable populations facing drought and lacking proper resources. Emphasizing proper management of water as an essential factor in solving economic and humanitarian issues.

Considering the rising populations, the demand for resources has sparked water disputes between nations. These disputes have been long-standing and transboundary waters are the main subject of them, closely tying it with geopolitical issues. Since nations share transboundary waters, any disputes could cause harm to diplomatic relations. Given the diversity of nations in terms of economic growth and capabilities, water quality, and ecosystem services; Nations with conflicting interests or a gap in capabilities are given the challenging task of cooperating to reach a consensus. Making conflict avoidance, a perplexing request. Moreover, the existing legal frameworks formed by the United Nations in the past fail to address the modern conflicts regarding transboundary waters.

Transboundary water management is a multifaceted issue that requires regional cooperation and legal agreements. Nations must collaborate to ease conflict as well as tackle issues such as geopolitics, fair water usage and economic imbalance.

Definition of Key Terms



Term	Definition
Transboundary waters	Any body of water (e.g. rivers, lakes, aquifers) that cross/act as a boundary between two or more countries.
Aquifers	A body of rock and/or sediment that holds groundwater. Act as underground reservoirs that aid in agriculture, drinking water and crop irrigation.
Geopolitics	The study of the effects of Earth's geography on politics and international relations.

Major Parties Involved

Egypt:

Egypt is a desert oasis that is home to an estimated population of 104 million. Water scarcity is a significant issue in Egypt and 98% of their water is sourced from the Nile River. As a downstream country, Egypt is significantly vulnerable when neighboring countries carry out projects or activities. Egypt has a water supply of 55.5 billion cubic meters however this is insufficient and requires over 80 billion cubic meters annually to realistically sustain the country. Furthermore, any decrease in water supply would be detrimental to agricultural productivity and result in economic loss. Thus, creating conflict with the country of Ethiopia over the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as they claim that the Dam could potentially result in a decreased water supply for Egypt.

Ethiopia:

Ethiopia is located upstream of the Nile River and its highlands supply more than 85 percent of the water that flows into the Nile River. In 2011, Ethiopia began



constructing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) which is a non-consumptive hydropower project that aims to reduce sediment inflow and produce electricity for Ethiopia and neighboring countries. Ethiopia also stated that it would store 7 billion cubic meters to source water to Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia during droughts. However, Egypt blatantly refused the continued construction of the Dam regardless of Ethiopia arguing that the Dam would not affect the water supply in Egypt.

China:

Throughout the years, China has made significant efforts in claiming historical rights over the South China Sea. With his political program, Xi Jinping has commenced pursuit of the South China Sea increasing tension with the Philippines over issues surrounding China's interference with the Philippine garrison at the Second Thomas Shoal as well as the country's obstruction of Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) affairs. The country has also made accusations of aggression from the Philippines stating that Philippine vessels intentionally attacked China's Coast Guard vessels. All in all, China aims to claim the entire South China Sea and has made use of armed forces while trying to mask the motives of its intervention.

Philippines:

Disrupted by China's actions the Philippines has refuted Beijing's claims of aggression and calls upon China to halt its actions pursuit as the South China Sea is not only shared with the Philippines but by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam as well. In 2016, the Philippines took this matter to the Permanent Court of Arbitration which deemed China's accusations legally baseless and ruled overwhelmingly in favor of the Philippines. However, China ignored these rulings and continued to disrupt Philippine vessels with grey-zone tactics.



Timeline

Date	Description of Events
1997	Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses
2007	UN-Water Thematic Priority Area on Transboundary Waters
2008	UN General Assembly Resolution on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers
2009	World Water Day 2009: Shared Waters, Shared Opportunities
2013	International Year of Water Cooperation
2023	UN 2023 Water Conference

Possible Solutions

- **Data sharing and transparency:** The biggest factor in water management is communication and transparency. Nations must collaborate to satisfy all interests and mediate conflict over water supply.
- **Infrastructure:** Make use of infrastructure to aid in water efficiency, water quality, etc. Emphasize the wrongful/rightful implementation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.
- **Alternative water sources:** Transboundary waters are a significant source of water for many countries. With the water demand, the over-reliance could cause a further increase in water scarcity as well as cause ecological imbalance.



Useful Resources: (from most useful to useful)

“Transboundary Water - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics.” n.d.

Www.sciencedirect.com. Accessed May 1, 2024.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/transboundary-water>.

“Transboundary Waters | International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’ 2005-2015.” 2015. Un.org. 2015.

https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/transboundary_waters.shtml.

“Transboundary Waters: Cooperation from Source to Sea.” n.d. SIWI - Leading Expert in Water Governance.

<https://siwi.org/publications/transboundary-waters-cooperation-from-source-to-sea/>.

United Nations. 2023. “Transboundary Waters.” UN-Water. 2023.

<https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters>.