

EPSU, PSI and over 150 civil society organizations stand behind UN Special Rapporteur Léo Heller and denounce private water industry interference



(23 October 2020) A group of private water operators tried to block the discussion of the report on “The Privatisation of Water and Sanitation Services” of the United Nations (U.N.) Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. 150 organisations including EPSU and PSI intervened to keep it on the agenda. The rapporteur Mr. Léo Heller did present the report to the U.N. General Assembly 21 October.

This new report is an important contribution to a debate on the role of private actors in the delivery of public services, including water and sanitation services. In recent years, at least four other U.N. Special Procedures (extreme poverty and human rights, education, housing, and debt) have written on this topic in their respective reports. Just this week, eight current and former U.N. Special

Rapporteurs and independent experts met at a major event on privatisation gathering hundreds of people online, and five of them released an [op-ed published worldwide on the importance of the issue of privatisation and human rights](#).

Leo Heller told the General Assembly about the risks privatisation of water brings to people:

- “ First, the imperative of private providers to make as much profit as possible can undermine States’ obligation to provide affordable water and sanitation services to all.
- Second, in a natural monopoly environment of the water and sanitation sector with only one provider, regulatory bodies are more exposed to be captured by providers and the capacity of regulators to protect the human rights to water and sanitation can be weakened.
- Third, in an ideal world, the power dynamic between public authorities and private providers would be equal. In practice, however, the power imbalances in the water and sanitation sector exacerbate the two above mentioned factors and present risks to human rights. “

The UN expert stated that “when for-profit businesses are in the picture, economic motivations may outweigh the motivation to fulfil the standards of the human rights to water and sanitation. In certain cases, stringent human rights requirements may be incentive for private operators not to invest in certain areas. As a result, countries could feel pressured to lower standards or weaken regulation.”

[For the letter and further background](#)

See also: [Privatization of water and sanitation services entails human rights risks, says UN expert](#)

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