

Universal Periodic Review Submission on the Right to Water in Syria

Submitted by:

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and

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This submission addresses the situation of the right to water in Syria, following up on recommendations accepted during previous UPR cycles. The protracted conflict, climate change, transboundary water pressures, and infrastructure destruction, has created a severe water crisis affecting millions. Despite some positive developments in 2026, including the first Green Climate Fund project for Syria, the overall situation remains critical. This submission provides an updated evidentiary basis and offers concrete recommendations for action based on the analysis and recommendations presented in the 2025 *Arab Watch Report- Syria*¹.

¹ Read more at www.annd.org and at <https://annd.org/en/publications/details/the-right-to-water-in-syria-and-the-agrarian-issue>

The right to water

1. During the 40th session of the UPR Working Group (January 2022), the Syrian Arab Republic received recommendations concerning access to safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as challenges related to water infrastructure.
2. The recommendation on ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation is assessed as *Partially implemented*. While some rehabilitation efforts have been made, up to 12 million Syrians continue to have limited access to water and sanitation services, with displaced populations disproportionately affected [1]. The recommendation on rehabilitating water infrastructure is assessed as *Partially implemented*. Damage to water infrastructure persists in more than 30 per cent of Syrian communities [1].
3. In 2026 the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Board approved in June 2026 the first-ever nationally-led project for Syria, titled "Water Resources Enhancement and Resilience" (WATER-RES), valued at over USD 27.7 million [9]. The project targets enhancing resilience to water scarcity risks in the Eastern Ghouta area in Rural Damascus and is expected to benefit approximately 1.5 million people over five years. The World Bank has approved USD 225 million in financing to rehabilitate water and sanitation infrastructure in Idlib, Homs, Hama, and Damascus [6], representing a significant step toward addressing the crisis. The Bank has also warned that reconstruction efforts must be climate-risk-informed [6]. In September 2025, UN-Habitat and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre signed a USD 3.27 million agreement to rehabilitate critical water infrastructure in Syria [10]. The "Enhancing Water Security" project aims to rehabilitate central water reservoirs and towers in Al-Malihah, on the outskirts of Damascus, benefiting 70,000 people [10]. These recent initiatives, represent progress, but remain insufficient to address the scale of the crisis.
4. The protracted conflict has resulted in widespread destruction of water infrastructure, disrupting the management and availability of water resources. Military operations have caused severe damage, exposing water sources to depletion, pollution, and mismanagement. According to the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, damage to water infrastructure affects more than 30 per cent of Syrian communities [1]. Loss of potable water through distribution networks averages 25 per cent of total water pumped, rising to approximately 50 per cent in Rural Damascus Governorate [2].
5. The conflict has also resulted in the loss of 30–40 per cent of engineers and workers capable of maintaining treatment plants, compounding operational challenges [2].
6. The water crisis has direct humanitarian consequences: More than 10 million people face acute difficulty accessing safe water [2]. In northeastern Syria, water scarcity remains a major challenge, with over 80 per cent of water supply systems not functioning mainly due to damaged power systems, affecting 1.8 million people [2]; In northern Syria, only half of households reported having sufficient water, with 44 per cent of communities identifying access to drinking water as the top WASH need [2]; In some areas of As-Sweida Governorate, people have access to less than 15 litres of water per day [2].
7. The weaponization of water during the conflict has resulted in enormous human suffering, deprived millions of people of water, food, and energy security, and impacted the nation's current and future human capital because of malnutrition, disease, and ailments that obstruct the development of children and young adults [2].

8. Climate change has driven desertification, increased the frequency of dust storms, accelerated soil degradation, and intensified forest fires. Between 2001 and 2023, Syria lost approximately 29.5 thousand hectares of tree cover, equivalent to a 28 per cent reduction since 2000 [2].
9. In 2025, the country experienced its most severe drought-like conditions in nearly 40 years [3]. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that at least 16.2 million people were affected by the 2025 wheat production deficit, which reached an estimated 2.7 million tons [3]. Simultaneously, nearly 10 million people are struggling to meet their basic water needs, according to the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector [2].
10. Insufficient rainfall and historically low water levels in the Euphrates River have reduced access to water for over five million people, leading to substantial harvest and income losses, an increase in waterborne diseases, and compounded protection risks [2]. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, pollution stems from three main causes: war-related destruction of wastewater treatment plants, absence of qualified personnel, and electricity shortages affecting water systems [2].
11. Control by neighboring states over transboundary water sources poses an existential threat to Syria's water security. Israel currently controls approximately 40 per cent of water resources in southern Syria, including dams and water sources in the Quneitra region, through the construction of reservoirs, dams, and wells serving settlements [7]. Turkish policies affecting the flow of the Euphrates River continue to impact agricultural and populated areas along the river basin [8].
12. In May 2026, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqqa governorates experienced severe flooding as a result of increased water releases from Turkish dams [4]. According to a Rapid Needs Assessment conducted by Oxfam (31 May-3 June 2026) covering 89 farming households [5] this affected agricultural land: nearly 20,500 dunums (approximately 2,050 hectares); 90 per cent of farming households reported total or partial loss of agricultural income; 85 per cent of irrigation systems non-functional due to submerged pumps and debris; 43 per cent sold livestock or other assets as coping strategy [5].

V. Recommendations

In light of the foregoing, and building on previous UPR recommendations, the submitting organizations recommend that the Syrian Arab Republic:

1. **Rebuild institutions concerned with water and irrigation** by establishing clear and transparent accountability mechanisms to evaluate adopted plans, assessing their alignment with the modernization of the legal and administrative framework governing water, within a 24-month timeframe.
2. **Link agricultural economy with regulation of irrigation and water rights** through a carefully designed development strategy that preserves fair access to labor, connects the labor market to green jobs, and promotes development based on environmental solutions, within 18 months of adoption.
3. **Enact more equitable water laws** to develop new concepts of the right to water and its governance, presenting clearer and more transparent binding agreements governing investment laws related to water, within 12 months.
4. **Ensure regional coordination on transboundary water resources** by working toward establishing binding regional coordination mechanisms with neighboring countries (Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon) to ensure equitable and sustainable management of shared water

resources, and to prevent the use of water as a pressure tool or weapon in conflicts, within 36 months.

5. **Integrate climate considerations into reconstruction projects** by mandating that all reconstruction projects in the water, housing, and agriculture sectors conduct environmental and climate impact assessments, and adopt sustainability and water-efficiency standards, leveraging available financing through the Green Climate Fund and the World Bank, within 12 months.
6. **Activate early warning systems for water-related disasters** by establishing early warning systems for floods and droughts, and strengthening the capacities of relevant institutions in forecasting and responding to climate risks, including through transboundary coordination in water management, within 24 months.
7. **Ensure access for civil society organizations** to monitor environmental and water quality conditions and assess the progress of reconstruction efforts, publishing monitoring results with full transparency, within 6 months.

References

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