



BACKGROUND PAPER:

United Nations Sustainable Development Programme  
***Preserving Global Freshwater***

**Introduction:**

Water is a necessity to all human life on earth. Access to safe water is one of the most basic human needs for overall health and wellbeing. With a growing population, increase in urbanization, and continuing need for water in agriculture, industry, and energy sectors, the demand for a usable water source is not expected to dwindle any time in the near future.

However, despite these needs, only 3% of water on the earth is adequate for human consumption, agricultural, and most industrial needs. The other 97% is saltwater, which has a salinity too high for many anthropogenic needs. Even of the 3% of freshwater present on the planet, only 1% of that is actually available to humans. The rest is stored in glaciers, ice caps, and snowy mountain ranges.

**Background & History:**

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, by 2025, 1.8 billion people will live in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world's population could live under water-stressed conditions. Industrial, agricultural, and domestic misuse, pollution, and over extraction of the world's freshwater has rapidly led to a depletion of the resource. Over the past 3 centuries, over 85% of the world's wetlands have been destroyed, eliminating a key ecological regulation service that helped to filter much of the world's freshwater. Much of the developed world has turned a blind eye to these circumstances as it is primarily impoverished regions and least developed countries (LDCs) that suffer the most from this global lack of safe drinkable water, whether due to economic or ecological obstacles.

**Current Status & The Problem:**

While much of the current water crisis hasn't been majorly felt in the developed world yet, soon such nations will pay the price for a mishandling of the world's freshwater. Less developed nations have already felt the negative effects for decades, with 2 billion people currently lacking access to safe water and over 1.2 million people per year dying as a result.

Agricultural demands continue to drain resources, accounting for 70% of freshwater usage, closely followed by energy sectors. Of the 37 major freshwater aquifers in the world, 21 are actively receding. The Ganges Basin in India is depleting due to increasing population stress. Mexico City, built on ancient lake beds, has experienced foundation sinking, at a rate of 9 inches per year in some areas. The root of this global crisis can be traced back to freshwater aquifers being drained at a rate faster than they can be replenished.

### **Committee Mission:**

Despite the bleak potential outcomes, there are still potential solutions to the problem that could save, or at least slow, the rate at which freshwater is used. For example, in response to its Millennium Drought from 1997-2009, Australia put in place measures to halve business and residential water use. Israel uses treated wastewater for agriculture, then using the same water waste as a renewable energy source. Other potential solutions can be found in desalination, or the conversion of saltwater into drinkable freshwater.

As delegates consider the implications of the depletion of freshwater resources on individual peoples and entire countries as a whole. The committee must consider taking immediate action towards finding sustainable solutions to global freshwater usage and providing safe drinkable water for all. Delegates are also urged to take into account the relations of countries relative to this subject considering that many developed nations are at the forefront of rapidly depleting many freshwater resources as opposed to less developed nations.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. How can countries implement affordable policies regarding water usage that lesser developed countries can easily adopt?

2. What sources of water are still accessible and how can they be preserved for future generations?
3. How can current issues caused by aquifer depletion be addressed before it's too late?

### **Additional Research:**

Delegates are encouraged to research the preservation of freshwater resources further and consider their own country's stance in confronting it. This background guide should be the first research delegates consider before diving even further into the topic. In terms of research, be sure that you understand the situation as a whole before narrowing the scope to focus on your own country. Helpful and reliable sources include the UN, BBC, official country sources, and the CIA World Factbook.

### **Sources:**

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/>

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<https://ourworldindata.org/water-access#:~:text=Unsafe%20water%20is%20responsible%20for,access%20to%20safe%20drinking%20water>

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170412-is-the-world-running-out-of-fresh-water>