

Summary Report to the National Council of Women of Canada

JULY 2026 High-level Political Forum Side Event on Water:



This brief recap follows the July 2026 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) Side Event on Water, which focused on the urgent and interconnected challenges of achieving **Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6)**. The discussions emphasized that access to safe water is only one part of a broader equation. Equal attention must be given to sanitation, hygiene, and sustained community engagement- that without adequate sanitation systems and safe hygiene practices, health outcomes continue to be compromised.

The HLPF dialogue also underscored that sustainable solutions depend on involving communities from the outset, building local capacity, and ensuring that systems are resilient and maintainable over time.

Sanitation remains a critical global gap: without safe waste management, access to water alone cannot prevent disease. Rapid urbanization further complicates access, particularly in informal settlements where infrastructure is limited. Participants stressed the importance of integrated, cross-sectoral approaches, effective monitoring, and coordination across areas such as public health, education, food security, and economic development. Improvements in water and sanitation have far-reaching impacts, especially for women and girls, enhancing health, safety, education, and economic opportunities.

These global insights strongly reinforce the [National Council of Women of Canada's \(NCWC\) Open Letter on Protecting Canada's Water](#), which calls for strengthened federal leadership to safeguard water as a public trust and a fundamental human right. The NCWC emphasizes that access to clean, safe water is essential to the health, dignity, and well-being of all people in Canada. Persistent inequities—particularly in Indigenous, rural, and remote communities—demonstrate the need for coordinated national action, accountability, and long-term investment in water and sanitation infrastructure- but not to the exclusion of urban centres where close to 14,000 kilometres of aging cement and asbestos pipes continue to deliver drinking water into homes across Canada.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation are internationally recognized human rights, derived from the right to an adequate standard of living under Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. On 28 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a historic resolution recognizing “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment

of life and all human rights.” Since 2015, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have further clarified that the rights to safe drinking water and to sanitation are closely related but distinct.



Canada endorsed this international consensus in 2012. However, successive federal governments have yet to establish a comprehensive legislative or policy framework to fully implement and enforce these rights domestically.

Protecting and ensuring equitable access to clean water is not only an environmental or infrastructure issue—it is a human rights obligation and a foundation for gender equality, public health, and sustainable development. Canada has both the capacity and the responsibility to align domestic action with its international commitments and to ensure that no community is left behind.

I encourage everyone to read and sign and share our Open Letter!

Respectfully Submitted

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NCWC President