



Public Law and Human Rights Forum

香港城市大學
City University of Hong Kong

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The CPLR Webinar Series on Asian Perspectives on Human Rights (V)

Water as Human Right: Critical Asian Perspective on its Present and Future Dimensions

Christine Wu
09 June 2022

Access to water is formally recognized by United Nations as a basic human right in 2010. Everyone is entitled to safe, sufficient and reliable drinking water for personal and domestic use. To promote the realization of such right, the Public Law and Human Rights Forum (CPLR) organised its fifth webinar in the Asian Perspective on Human Rights series on 09 June 2022. Experts were brought together to present their views on various issues surrounding the human right to water



From left to right:

top row: Dr Fozia LONE, Prof Adeel ZAFAR, Prof Otto SPIJKERS

bottom row: Prof. Khin Ni Ni Prof Shahbaz KHAN, Prof Huiping CHEN

The webinar began with a welcoming speech by the moderator, **Dr Fozia LONE** (Associate Professor, Associate Director of CPLR, School of Law, City University of Hong Kong). She introduced the aim of this webinar is to discuss the progress and challenges in ensuring equitable access to water in Asia, further to explore how existing water governance frameworks and policies can be improved to achieve sustainable development goals. Five knowledgeable panellists were



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invited to speak at the webinar, including: **Prof Adeel ZAFAR** (Executive Director, Pacific Water Research Centre & Professor of Professional Practice, School of Sustainable Energy Engineering, Simon Fraser University, Canada); **Prof Otto SPIJKERS** (Professor at Wuhan University's China Institute of Boundary and Ocean Studies (CIBOS) & Professor at Wuhan University's Research Institute of Environmental Law (RIEL)); **Prof Shahbaz KHAN** (Director of UNESCO Beijing, UNESCO Representative to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea); **Prof Huiping CHEN** (Professor of International Law, School of Law, Xiamen University and Director of International Economic Law Institute) and **Prof. Khin Ni Ni THEIN** (Founder and Chairperson of the Water Mothers Organization and Initiator of the Myanmar Water Think Tank & Secretary of the Advisory Group of Water, Research and Training Centre (WRTC))

Prof. Thein was of the view that developing an effective water policy is of the utmost importance for sustainable development to be achieved. She elaborated on a range of barriers that countries need to overcome while implementing water policy and stressed that cooperation between stakeholders and policymakers is the key to address these challenges. **Prof Spijkers** explained that international human right to water and SDG6 will cross-fertilize and eventually attain a human right of sustainable access to water. He expressed his concern regarding the human rights approach to SDG6 as the ecological and economic pillars might be outweighed by the social pillar. **Prof Khan** introduced the UNESCO international hydrological programme and shared his observations on the UN Water World Water Development report 2019, UN 2023 Water Conference, River Culture and the concept of eco-civilization in China. UNESCO suggestions on the implementation of the right to water for decision-makers were examined in his speech as well. **Prof Chen** provided a detailed analysis on the interaction between the right to water and foreign investment. She presented her findings on the contribution of *amicus curiae* in the implementation of such right in international investment law, and discussed whether human right can be used as an argument to justify state's action in investment arbitration. **Prof Zafar** laid out four challenges Asia countries face with safe water supply: uneven resources distribution; lack of adequate investment; technological and management deficit, and institutional deficit. He moved on to explain how these problems could possibly be tackled through transboundary water treaties, south-south cooperation and partnership etc.

Dr Lone gave a brief concluding remark on behalf of CPLR. She thanked the panellists for their contributions and the participants for their attendance which made the webinar a great success.



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The recording of this webinar is available at: <https://youtu.be/FflvNOP5TdA>

