



General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 February 2026

English only

Human Rights Council

Sixty-first session

23 February–2 April 2026

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by Chongqing Centre for Equal Social Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 January 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Advancing Water Environmental Governance to Realize the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment in Arid and Resource-Constrained Regions — A Case Study of Water Supply and Sanitation Upgrading in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China

A clean, healthy, and sustainable environment constitutes a fundamental foundation for human survival and development. In recent years, the international community has gradually reached a consensus in recognizing the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right. At its core, this right seeks to ensure that people living in different regions and under diverse development conditions can equally enjoy access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation, and a sound ecological environment. It is not only concerned with environmental protection as such, but is also closely interconnected with the right to health, the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to development.

As this consensus continues to deepen, growing attention has been paid to how environmental rights can be realized in practice, particularly in regions characterized by harsh natural conditions and severe resource constraints. Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China, located in northwest inland China, is both an important ecological barrier and a multi-ethnic region. Its water resources are unevenly distributed across time and space, and long-standing disparities exist between urban and rural areas in terms of water supply infrastructure and wastewater treatment capacity. For a considerable period, some rural areas faced challenges such as unstable drinking-water quality and insufficient sanitation facilities, which limited residents' health outcomes, living conditions, and prospects for sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, China has, in the course of promoting green and low-carbon development and improving people's livelihoods, gradually incorporated rural water supply and sanitation governance in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China into an integrated framework for environmental rights protection. Related practices have thus become an important entry point for responding to environmental rights concerns and improving basic public services at the grassroots level.

I. Improving Basic Living Conditions through Systematic Water Environmental Governance

In response to these challenges, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China has developed a governance approach characterized by systematic planning and context-specific implementation, treating drinking-water security and environmental sanitation as equally important objectives.

On the water supply side, efforts have been made to promote integrated urban–rural centralized water supply systems. By coordinating water source development, purification treatment, and pipeline network construction, the stability and safety of rural water supply have been continuously enhanced. At the same time, greater attention has been paid to the ecological protection of water source areas, with the aim of reducing environmental risks and improving resource efficiency.

Jiashi County provides a representative example. By introducing glacier and snowmelt water resources and constructing centralized water supply projects equipped with digitalized monitoring systems, the county has achieved full coverage of safe drinking water in rural areas. Similar practices have gradually been extended across Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China, leading to sustained improvements in rural residents' access to tap water and more reliable drinking-water services.

In terms of wastewater governance, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China has addressed the long-standing inadequacy of sewage collection and treatment capacity in rural areas by incorporating wastewater management into the broader rural living environment improvement strategy. Taking into account village size and local natural conditions, measures have been adopted to promote sewage collection, treatment, and resource

utilization. Through the construction of wastewater treatment facilities and supporting pipeline networks, domestic sewage is centrally collected and treated in accordance with relevant standards. In some areas, treated wastewater is reused for ecological greening or water replenishment, thereby combining pollution control with resource recycling.

II. Integrated Impacts on Public Health, Ecology, and Governance

As these governance measures have been implemented on a sustained basis, their impacts have gradually extended beyond infrastructure improvement to broader dimensions, including public health, environmental quality, and public service provision.

From a livelihood perspective, improvements in drinking-water safety and sanitation conditions have helped reduce the risk of water-related diseases and environmental health hazards. Residents' quality of life and sense of security have steadily improved, while access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation has increasingly shifted from temporary or project-based improvements to more stable and accessible public services.

From an ecological perspective, centralized water supply systems have reduced energy consumption per unit of water supply, while wastewater reuse has lowered pollutant discharges. These measures support the sustainable use of water resources and contribute to regional ecological restoration. In arid regions, such practices also help promote synergies between pollution reduction and carbon mitigation, allowing environmental improvement and green transformation to reinforce each other.

From an economic perspective, improvements in the living environment have created more favorable conditions for agricultural production and rural industrial development. In some areas, enhanced environmental quality has contributed to the development of ecological agriculture and rural tourism, gradually forming a positive interaction between environmental improvement and livelihood opportunities.

From a governance perspective, water supply and sanitation upgrading has strengthened grassroots public service delivery and environmental governance capacity. Through unified planning, standardized operation, and digital monitoring, water environmental governance has progressively shifted from a project-oriented construction phase to routine and institutionalized management. This transition has provided more durable institutional support for the long-term realization of environmental rights.

III. Lessons for the Sustainable Realization of Environmental Rights

The experience of rural water supply and sanitation governance in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China demonstrates that, even under arid and resource-constrained conditions, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is not merely an abstract normative concept. Rather, it can be progressively realized through systematic, development-oriented governance measures. Integrating drinking-water security, wastewater management, ecological protection, and low-carbon development into a unified policy framework helps mitigate potential tensions between environmental improvement and development objectives, enabling environmental rights protection to advance in parallel with socio-economic development.

These practices are closely aligned with the United Nations system's understanding of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Relevant international consensus emphasizes that the realization of environmental rights depends not only on improvements in ecological conditions, but also on access to basic public services, effective environmental governance capacity, and inclusive decision-making processes. From this perspective, water supply and sanitation governance, as foundational public services, play a critical role in translating the normative recognition of environmental rights into tangible and sustainable conditions in people's daily lives.

Looking ahead, further consolidating existing achievements requires continued attention to the operation and maintenance of facilities, capacity-building at the grassroots level, and the gradual expansion of public participation and environmental information transparency. These

efforts will help prevent the rebound of environmental risks and enhance the stability and sustainability of environmental rights protection. For other developing regions facing similar water resource constraints and environmental pressures, the experience of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China offers a possible pathway for advancing the realization of environmental rights within concrete development processes.
