



Declassified¹

AS/Soc (2026) PV04add2

23 June 2026

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

of the hearing on “Guaranteeing the right to access to drinking water” held on Thursday, 4 June 2026, in Athens

Ms Saskia Kluit, Chairperson, opened the hearing and welcomed Dr Dionysia Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Chair of the Special Standing Committee on Environmental Protection of the Greek Parliament, Mr Scoullos Michael, Professor Emeritus, Laboratory of Environmental Chemistry and Ms Claire Nicolet, Deputy Cell Manager Emergency Cell, MSF (Doctors without borders) (online).

The Committee **welcomed** Ms Claire Nicolet who joined the meeting online and presented, with her collaborator, Mr Odey Almanaseer, the conclusions of the report published by MSF in 2026, *Water as a Weapon – Israel's destruction and deprivation of water and sanitation in Gaza*, based on direct observations by MSF in the Gaza Strip as well as on the analysis of data collected by MSF and other field actors.

According to the data collected, nearly 89% of water and sanitation infrastructure had been damaged or destroyed. Access to safe drinking water had become extremely limited, as distribution networks had been severely disrupted or completely destroyed. As a result, many families had been forced to rely on unsafe or contaminated water sources, significantly increasing health risks. At the same time, the price of water had increased by approximately 500%. Experts stressed that access to clean water had become a matter of daily survival. Residents had to wait for long hours to obtain water from tanker trucks, while sewage systems had been destroyed and basic hygiene products had become scarce. The situation had been further aggravated by the overcrowding of displacement camps, whose capacity had been greatly exceeded. Winter weather conditions, marked by flooding and strong winds, had made these sites particularly hazardous. Faced with the scarcity of resources, families had often prioritized access to drinking water at the expense of food or personal hygiene. MSF medical teams had observed a significant increase in diarrhoeal diseases, skin infections, scabies, and other illnesses linked to the lack of clean water and adequate sanitation conditions. One in four people in Gaza, primarily children, had been suffering from diarrhoea. Beyond public health concerns, the experts emphasized the violations of human dignity. The absence of private spaces for washing or using toilets had been contrary to the population's cultural and religious norms. Persons with disabilities had faced additional obstacles in accessing the available facilities. They also referred to the security risks faced by civilians while collecting water or food, including violence that could occur in queues, particularly against children. In conclusion, the speakers stressed that the restrictions imposed on humanitarian aid and the damage inflicted on essential infrastructure had forced the inhabitants of Gaza to live in extremely precarious conditions, with serious consequences for their health, safety, and dignity. On behalf of MSF, they called for the protection of civilian infrastructure, particularly drinking water and sanitation networks, safe and sustained humanitarian access, the restoration of essential services, and the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers.

The Committee **continued with a hearing** with the participation of Mr Michael Scoullos.

The speaker recalled that, as early as Ancient Greece, health had been recognised as a goddess. Despite the progress achieved in certain regions of the world, particularly in Europe and the Mediterranean basin, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 had remained far from being achieved. None of the 13 targets under this goal had even been on track. Nearly half of them had been progressing very slowly or had even regressed. This situation had been attributed to a series of crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic, environmental factors, and severe global funding shortages. The most alarming indicators had concerned maternal and child mortality. Although 133 countries had achieved the targets relating to under-five mortality, the global maternal mortality rate had remained extremely high. More than 700 women had died every day from preventable pregnancy-related causes, a figure three times higher than the target set by the SDGs. With regard to communicable diseases, efforts to eradicate epidemics such as

¹ The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 23 June 2026.

AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis had slowed down or even reversed. At the same time, childhood vaccination coverage for essential immunizations had fallen below pre-pandemic levels. As for non-communicable diseases, more than 18 million people under the age of 70 had died prematurely each year. The goal of reducing premature mortality from these diseases by one third by 2030 had been considered out of reach. Regarding universal health coverage, more than half of the world's population had still lacked access to essential health services. In Western societies in particular, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, depression, age-related fractures, melanoma, breast cancer, and asthma had become more common than they had been thirty years earlier. This trend might have been linked to a shift in the evolutionary paradigm, namely the mismatch hypothesis, which emphasised the discrepancy between our genetic heritage and our way of life.

Regarding water quality, the expert emphasised that significant progress had been made in many parts of the world, particularly in the Mediterranean region, thanks to the implementation of recommendations issued by the World Health Organization, European legislation, and other international regulatory frameworks. However, even within the Mediterranean region, 15 million people had still lacked access to safe water. At the global level, the world had remained far from achieving SDG 6 by 2030, as 2.2 billion people were projected to remain without safely managed drinking water services, 3.4 billion were expected to lack access to safely managed sanitation services, and 1.7 billion were projected to be deprived of basic hygiene services at home. Water quality extended beyond microbiological parameters alone to encompass all kinds of pollutants, including chemical substances originating from industrial emissions, various discharges, agricultural runoff, and other human activities. The example of widespread pollution ranging from macroplastics to microplastics and nanoplastics had been particularly illustrative. In addition, disasters and catastrophes such as armed conflicts, forest fires, floods, and hurricanes had mobilized and transported large quantities of harmful substances into aquatic environments, further aggravating water pollution.

Issues relating to water quality depended on the "health of ecosystems" and were linked to phenomena such as overconsumption in certain regions and the worsening of water scarcity. Nearly half of the world's population, including in some parts of the Mediterranean basin, had experienced severe water shortages during at least part of the year. Part of the solution had rested on the proper treatment and reuse of wastewater, as well as on desalination. Nevertheless, only 56% of domestic wastewater had been safely treated. At the same time, transboundary cooperation in the field of water had remained fragile, although a number of highly promising initiatives had existed. In the Mediterranean region, these had included the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus (WEFE Nexus) approach, the Source-to-Sea Continuum Strategy, recently endorsed by the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP), as well as initiatives supported by the Union for the Mediterranean, the WES programme, the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med), and the PRIMA programme.

The Committee then **heard** from Ms Dionysia Theodora Avgerinopoulou.

The speaker recalled that water constituted not only the foundation of life and human health, but also an essential factor for food security, economic development, environmental protection, and peace, particularly in the Mediterranean region. Water insecurity had remained one of the major challenges of the twenty-first century. SDG 6 had suffered from a chronic lack of funding; as water was still largely regarded as a public good, private investment had remained insufficient. She stressed that parliaments and public authorities should have relied more extensively on scientific evidence to adapt legislative frameworks to the multiple risks affecting water quality and public health, including the worsening of droughts and floods as a result of climate change, industrial and agricultural pollution, and contamination by pharmaceuticals, plastics, microplastics, and other pollutants.

She drew attention to the persistent inequalities in access to safe drinking water, including in developed countries. She referred to the situation of certain Roma communities in Greece that had faced difficulties in accessing clean water, as well as that of isolated villages in mountainous regions where available resources had not been sufficient to meet basic domestic needs for drinking water and sanitation.

Greece has increasingly faced the consequences of climate change on water availability. Authorities are observing decreased rainfall in some regions, a shift in its seasonal distribution, an increase in extreme weather events, and heightened competition among different water uses, particularly for agriculture and tourism. The Greek islands have been especially vulnerable due to the extended tourist season, which significantly increases pressure on local resources. In response to these challenges, Greece has undertaken substantial investments to modernize supply networks, improve irrigation efficiency, develop wastewater reuse, and strengthen the use of digital technologies for water management. The speaker cited the national program "Ydor 2.0" ("Water 2.0"), a large-scale national program for water infrastructure and irrigation, with a budget exceeding €4 billion. Efforts have also been made to diversify water supply sources, particularly for the Athens region where almost half of the Greek population resides, as well as investments in desalination, especially for the islands, the reuse of treated wastewater, rainwater harvesting and the study of extreme hydrological events.

Finally, the speaker highlighted the growing role of the Greek Parliamentary Subcommittee on Rivers, which had become a reference point for Greek citizens, scientists, and public stakeholders on water-related issues. Her experience led her to advocate for specialized parliamentary bodies capable of continuously monitoring issues related to access to drinking water, the sustainable management of water resources, and their connection to public health.

The general rapporteur on the situation of women and children in Gaza, **Mr O'Reilly**, asked the experts at what point the deprivation of access to water ceased to be merely a humanitarian crisis and became a genuine instrument of war aimed at threatening the survival of civilian populations.

Ms Ovchynnykova shared the Ukrainian experience, which had been marked by the environmental consequences of the war. She referred to the destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam in June 2023, which she described as one of the greatest ecological disasters in recent European history. According to her, the event caused the flooding of numerous communities, the destruction of ecosystems, massive biodiversity losses, and significant social and economic damage. She also highlighted the harm inflicted on the marine environment following the bombardment of oil facilities in the Odesa region, which affected protected bird species and coastal ecosystems. Drawing on these examples, she advocated strengthening international legal instruments aimed at preventing and punishing environmental crimes. In particular, she called on member States to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law and to continue efforts to improve the recognition and prosecution of serious environmental damage committed during armed conflicts. Finally, she invited the experts to identify new political and legal tools to prevent water and the environment from being used as weapons of war.

Ms Nicolet explained that her organization's findings were based on field observations showing that difficulties in accessing water extended far beyond the direct consequences of the fighting. She noted that many essential water infrastructures had been destroyed or severely damaged, including water production and treatment facilities. However, she emphasized above all the persistent obstacles imposed by the Israeli authorities on the delivery of equipment, spare parts, and materials required for the operation and repair of desalination and drinking water production facilities. According to her, although certain humanitarian goods continued to enter the Gaza Strip, the equipment essential to the water sector remained blocked, preventing the restoration of essential services. She also referred to the difficulties humanitarian organizations encountered in obtaining the necessary authorizations to repair damaged water pipelines, including in cases involving urgent interventions on strategic infrastructure. In her view, the accumulation of these obstacles demonstrated that access to water had become a central issue in the conflict and that the deprivation of water constituted an instrument for weakening the civilian population.

Ms Avgerinopoulou recalled that access to safe drinking water constituted a fundamental human right and emphasized that the deprivation of water in conflict zones constituted a violation of international humanitarian law and, in certain cases, of international criminal law and environmental law. She stressed the need to ensure water quality throughout its entire life cycle, from abstraction to post-use treatment.

Mr Scoullou drew attention to the growing degradation of water resources as a result of human activities. He pointed out that there were now very few regions in the world, including the most remote areas such as the Arctic and Antarctica, that did not bear the imprint of human activity. According to him, this situation compromised the quality of water resources at their source and made water treatment necessary before consumption in most regions of the world. He also emphasized that the reuse of wastewater had become a strategic necessity in response to the increasing scarcity of available resources. While technological advances had made it possible to improve water treatment performance and reduce associated energy costs, uncertainties remained regarding the long-term effects of many micropollutants present in treated water. He referred in particular to the presence of pharmaceutical residues, chemical substances, and nanopollutants, more than 180 of which had been identified in certain treated wastewater sources in Greece. While calling for continued efforts to promote water reuse, particularly for green spaces and certain agricultural activities, he stressed the need to apply the precautionary principle and to strengthen scientific knowledge concerning these emerging contaminants. He also noted that desalination constituted an important solution for regions facing water scarcity, although it continued to raise environmental concerns, particularly regarding brine discharges and energy consumption. Finally, returning to the situation in Gaza, he expressed regret over the destruction of two pilot wastewater treatment and reuse facilities that had just been completed, illustrating the vulnerability of water infrastructure during periods of conflict and the long-term consequences of such destruction on access to water.

In conclusion, **the Chairperson** recalled that access to water was particularly crucial for children in conflict zones and emphasised the urgent need to ensure access to safe drinking water in Gaza.

List of presence / Liste de présence

(The names of members who took part in the meeting are in bold /
Les noms des membres ayant pris part à la réunion sont en caractères gras)

Chairperson / *Président·e*:

Ms Saskia Kluit (Netherlands / Pays-Bas)	
---	--

Vice-Chairpersons / *Vice-Président·es* :

Ms Carmen Leyte (Spain / Espagne)	
Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova (Ukraine)	
Mme Sophia Chikirou (France)	

Members / Membres	Country / Pays	Alternates / Remplaçant·es
Ms Ogerta Manastirliu	Albania / Albanie	Mr Ardit Bido
Mr Cerni Escalé	Andorra / Andorre	Mme Bernadeta Coma
Mr Armen Gevorgyan	Armenia / Arménie	Ms Hripsime Grigoryan
Ms Claudia Arpa	Austria / Autriche	Ms Doris Bures
Mr Andreas Minnich	Austria / Autriche	Ms Agnes Sirkka Prammer
Mme Anne Lambelin	Belgium / Belgique	Mr Andries Gryffroy
M. Benoît Lutgen	Belgium / Belgique	Mme Véronique Durenne
Ms Darijana Filipović	Bosnia and Herzegovina / Bosnie-Herzégovine	Mr Šemsudin Dedić
Ms Atidzhe Alieva-Veli	Bulgaria / Bulgarie	Mr Kostadin Angelov
Ms Maya Dimitrova	Bulgaria / Bulgarie	Mr Ilian Iontchev
Mr Marko Pavić	Croatia / Croatie	Ms Rada Borić
Ms Christiana Erotokritou	Cyprus / Chypre	Mr Constantinos Efstathiou
Ms Ivana Mádllová	Czechia / Tchéquie	Mr Ondřej Šimetka
ZZ...	Czechia / Tchéquie	ZZ...
Ms Camilla Fabricius	Denmark / Danemark	Ms Charlotte Bagge Hansen
Ms Hanah Lahe	Estonia / Estonie	Ms Kadri Tali
Ms Minna Reijonen	Finland / Finlande	Mr Pekka Aittakumpu
Mme Sophia Chikirou	France	Mme Sabrina Sebaihi
M. Alexandre Dufosset	France	Mme Liliana Tanguy
M. Alain Milon	France	M. Alain Cadec
Mme Maud Petit	France	M. Jean Laussucq
Ms Birgit Bessin	Germany / Allemagne	Ms Martina Kempf
Mr Vinzenz Glaser	Germany / Allemagne	Ms Christin Willnat
Ms Inge Gräßle	Germany / Allemagne	Mr Julian Joswig
Mr Serdar Yüksel	Germany / Allemagne	Ms Franziska Kersten
Mr Georgios Stamatis	Greece / Grèce	Mr Dionysios-Charalampos Kalamatianos
Ms Maria Syrengela	Greece / Grèce	Ms Maria-Nefeli Chatziioannidou
Ms Mónika Bartos	Hungary / Hongrie	Mr Zoltán Bóna
Ms Mónika Dunai	Hungary / Hongrie	Mr István Hollik
Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar Baldursdóttir	Iceland / Islande	Ms Ásthildur Lóa Þórsdóttir
Mr Joseph O'Reilly	Ireland / Irlande	Mr Rónán Mullen
Ms Elena Bonetti	Italy / Italie	Mr Roberto Rosso
Ms Aurora Floridia	Italy / Italie	Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro
Mr Alessandro Giglio Vigna	Italy / Italie	Mr Graziano Pizzimenti
Mr Stefano Maullu	Italy / Italie	Ms Domenica Spinelli

M. Andris Bērziņš	Latvia / <i>Lettonie</i>	Mr Edmunds Cepurītis
Mr Marc Risch	Liechtenstein	Mr Joachim Vogt
Ms Orinta Leiputė	Lithuania / <i>Lituanie</i>	Mr Zigmantas Balčytis
Mme Stéphanie Weydert	Luxembourg	M. Paul Galles
Mr Michael Farrugia	Malta / <i>Malte</i>	Mr Joseph Beppe Fenech Adami
Mr Ion Groza	Republic of Moldova / <i>République de Moldova</i>	Ms Ana Calinici
M. Régis Bergonzi	Monaco	Mme Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo
Mr Miloš Konatar	Montenegro / <i>Monténégro</i>	Ms Edina Dešić
Ms Saskia Kluit	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	Mr Theo Bovens
Ms Carla Moonen	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	Mr Felix Klos
Mr Bekim Kjeku	North Macedonia / <i>Macédoine du Nord</i>	Mr Sadula Duraki
Mr Per Vidar Kjølmoen	Norway / <i>Norvège</i>	Ms Seher Aydar
Mr Szymon Hołownia	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Ms Magdalena Biejat
Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Mr Mirosław Adam Orliński
Mr Jan Filip Libicki	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	ZZ...
Mr Nuno Fazenda	Portugal	Mr António Mendonça Mendes
Mr Carlos Silva Santiago	Portugal	Ms Sofia Carreira
Ms Georgeta-Carmen Holban	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Ms Mirela Elena Adomnicăi
Ms Dumitrina Mitrea	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Mr Iulian Bulai
Mr Robert-Ionatan Sighiartău	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Ms Maria-Gabriela Horga
Mr Gerardo Giovagnoli	San Marino / <i>Saint-Marin</i>	Ms Alice Mina
Mr Vladimir Đorđević	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Mr Predrag Marsenić
Ms Tatjana Pašić	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Ms Jelena Milošević
Ms Veronika Remišová	Slovak Republic / <i>République Slovaque</i>	M. Pavol Goga
Mr Dean Premik	Slovenia / <i>Slovénie</i>	Ms Iva Dimic
Ms María Fernández	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Ms Luz Martinez Seijo
Mr José Latorre	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Ms Nerea Ahedo
Ms Carmen Leyte	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Mr José Antonio Bermúdez De
Ms Sofia Amlöh	Sweden / <i>Suède</i>	Ms Annika Strandhäll
Ms Victoria Tiblom	Sweden / <i>Suède</i>	Ms Boriana Åberg
Ms Sibel Arslan	Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mme Céline Amaudruz
Mme Valérie Piller Carrard	Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mr Niklaus-Samuel Gugger
Mr Murat Cahid Cingi	Türkiye	Mr Mustafa Canbey
Ms Gökçe Gökçen	Türkiye	Mr Namık Tan
Mr Berdan Öztürk	Türkiye	Ms Sevilay Çelenk
Mr Sevan Sivacioğlu	Türkiye	Ms Sena Nur Çelik Kanat
Ms Olena Khomenko	Ukraine	Ms Larysa Bilozir
Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova	Ukraine	Mr Andrii Lopushanskyi
Ms Lesia Zaboranna	Ukraine	Mr Rostyslav Tistyk
Baroness Thérèse Coffey	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Dan Aldridge
Mr Mike Reader	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Leigh Ingham
Ms Elaine Stewart	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Kate Osamor
Lord Don Touhig	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Michelle Welsh

Partners for Democracy / Partenaires pour la Démocratie

Mr / M. Allal Amraoui, Morocco / Maroc

Mr / M. Hassan Arif, Morocco / Maroc

Secretariat of Delegation or of Political Group / Secrétariat de Délégation ou de Groupe politique

Ms / Mme Francesca Verginelli, Italy / Italie

Ms / Mme Francesca Albanese Arbogast, Socialists, Democrats and Green Group / Groupe des socialistes, démocrates et verts

Mr / M. Sabih Gazi Öztürk, Türkiye

Experts / Expert-es

Ms / Mme Domna Michailidou, Greek Minister of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs / ministre grecque de la Cohésion sociale et des Affaires familiales

Ms / Mme Niki Kerameus, Greek Minister of Labour and Social Insurance / ministre grecque du Travail et de la Sécurité social

Mr / M. Stelios Maridakis, Vice President of the National Youth Council of Greece / vice-président du Conseil national de la jeunesse de Grèce

Mr / M. Basil C. Tarlatzis, Professor Emeritus of Obstetrics-Gynaecology and Human Reproduction, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki / professeur émérite d'obstétrique-gynécologie et de reproduction humaine à l'université Aristote de Thessalonique

Ms / Mme Alexandra Tragakis, Professor of economic demography at Harokopio University / professeure de démographie économique à l'université Harokopio

Ms / Mme Dionysia Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Chair of the Special Standing Committee on Environmental Protection of the Greek Parliament / présidente de la commission permanente spéciale sur la protection de l'environnement du Parlement grec

Mr / M. Scoullou Michael, Professor Emeritus, Laboratory of Environmental Chemistry / professeur émérite, Laboratoire de chimie environnementale

Mr / M. Grigoris Konstantellos, Mayor of Varis Voulas Vouliagmeni / maire de Varis Voulas Vouliagmeni

Other persons present / Autres personnes présentes

Mr / M. Armağan Candan, Representative of the Turkish Cypriot Community (*) / Représentant de la communauté chypriote turque (*)

(*) In accordance with Resolution 1376 (2004) / Conformément à la Résolution 1376 (2004)

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Ms / Mme Louise Barton, Director, Inclusive and Sustainable Societies and Co-operation Directorate / Directrice, Direction des sociétés inclusives et durables et de la coopération

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /
Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

Ms / Mme Catherine Du-BernardHead of the Secretariat / Cheffe du Secrétariat

Ms / Mme Aiste RamanauskaiteSecretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission

Ms / Mme Jannick DevauxSecretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission

Ms / Mme Claire Dubois-HamdiSecretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission

Ms / Mme Prisca BarthelEurope Prize Section / Section du Prix de l'Europe

Ms / Mme Xenia BirioukovaAssistant/ Assistante Ms

/ Mme Özgü TanAssistant/ Assistante