



GEN7M0013-32

VERBAL NOTE

The Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and referring to the Office's request, dated 25th September 2013, to provide information and views for the development by the Office of the handbook related to the Human Rights Council resolution 16/2 of 2011 entitled "The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation", has the honour to provide the following information:

- What are the opportunities and challenges faced by your State in realizing the human rights to water and sanitation?

In Finland, the human rights to water and sanitation have been realized according to international standards. Finland is a sparsely populated country with the area of 338 000 km² and the population of 5.4 million (16 inhabitants per km²). Around 92 percent of the population is served by the public water supply and 85 percent by public sewer networks.

Those not served by the public water services mainly live in rural areas and are responsible for their property's small scale water services. They use private shallow wells or bedrock bore-holes and have to treat domestic wastewater in an effective manner.

It is neither realistic nor practical to expand the coverage of public networks note worthily in the foreseeable future.

- Are there any specific examples of legislation, policies, budgeting processes, service delivery programs and projects or accountability mechanisms in force in your country that would be relevant to the realization of the rights to water and sanitation? Could you please provide us with copies of the relevant information?

According to the Finnish Water Service Act a municipality has to secure the availability of sufficient water services when required to due to the need of a relatively large number of inhabitants or health considerations or environmental protection (Sec. 6). An individual has a right to institute proceeding to enforce a municipality to provide water services (Sec. 31). Water use charges must be equitable for all users and they may include only a minimum return on the capital (Sec. 18 and 19). In the Finnish Water Act, the abstraction of domestic water is prioritised over other new and existing uses to a certain extent (Ch. 4, Sec. 5).

In Finland, there are certain possibilities to get subsidies for the water supply and sanitation in rural areas. According to the Water Services Support Act the development of collective water supply and sewerage in rural areas may be subsidised. The aim of the subsidy is to encourage investments to the public water supply in order reduce loadings, reach the water quality standards of drinking water and support the growth of the economy and employment in rural areas.

Public water services projects in rural areas are usually managed by small water cooperatives. The State or a respective municipality may subsidize the investment costs of a water cooperative but not the maintenance costs of a water services system. Later on, water cooperatives are encouraged to become a part of a municipal water supply plant.

The total subsidy for the development of water services is around 25 million per year. This is around 10 percent of the total investments in water services in Finland.

The Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurance of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 17 December 2013



Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights