

General Assembly adopts historic first UN Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention

Ireland, Bangladesh worked with UN organizations to bring the resolution on drowning, which claims hundreds of thousands of lives every year

NEW YORK - The United Nations General Assembly today adopted a historic Resolution on drowning prevention, acknowledging the issue for the first time in its 75-year history.

Drowning cost the world over 2.5 million lives in the last decadeⁱ. The vast majority of these deaths could and should have been prevented.

The new Resolution, an initiative by Bangladesh and Ireland, and co-sponsored by 79 Member States, recognizes that drowning affects every nation of the world – though its impact is disproportionate. 90 percent of drowning deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, with Asia carrying the highest burden.ⁱⁱ

Introducing the Resolution at the UN General Assembly in New York, **Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN, Rabab Fatima** said:

“Drowning is a major cause of global mortality, accounting for a greater loss of life annually, than to maternal mortality or malnutrition. The imperative to act on drowning is not simply moral or political. The economic cost is equally untenable. As a leading cause of child mortality in Bangladesh and regionally, we recognise the urgency to secure a resolution to generate greater political commitment towards the prevention of drowning. This resolution provides a framework for global and national cooperation to do that. We are honoured to have worked in partnership with the Government of Ireland on this effort”.

A new UN Day for drowning prevention has been established, to be recognised annually on 25 July.

Speaking after the adoption of the Resolution, **Ireland’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Geraldine Byrne Nason** said:

“As an island nation, Ireland knows well both the promise and risk that water presents. It is our immense pleasure to partner with the Government of Bangladesh – on the frontline of the fight against drowning – in sponsoring this initiative. This Resolution, and the first ever World Drowning Prevention Day on July 25, are a moment to highlight the immediate need for strategic and significant international action to save lives and prevent hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths”.

According to the WHO’s latest estimates, drowning is the cause of 235,000 deaths every year.ⁱⁱⁱ Importantly, the Resolution identifies that drowning is a preventable cause of mortality or morbidity that disproportionately affects children and adolescents in rural areas. Many countries report drowning as a leading cause of childhood mortality, particularly in children under-5 years.

*“Children and young people represent the majority of lives lost to the water globally” said **Rory Nefdt, Senior Advisor Health, UNICEF Headquarters**. “This resolution makes a clear case for UNICEF action; to support Member States in implementing child survival solutions that although proven, have long been overlooked. We must end this needless loss of life and give children and young people the tools to reclaim water as a safe space”.*

The Resolution recognises the association between drowning and development. Action on drowning prevention presents an important opportunity to make progress towards targets within several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. There are clear links between drowning and other global agreements relevant to sustainable development, community resilience to climate change, and disaster risk reduction.

“Through this new UN General Assembly Resolution, Member States are giving drowning its due recognition, commensurate with the impact it has on families and communities around the world,” noted **Dr Etienne Krug, Director of the Department of Social Determinants of Health, World Health Organization (WHO)**.

“Given that children and adolescents in rural areas are disproportionately affected by drowning, preventing this public health scourge is one step towards building a fairer, healthier world.”

Recognising that drowning is preventable and that scalable, low-cost interventions exist, Member States are encouraged, on a voluntary basis, to undertake a range of coordinated recognised interventions, relevant to national circumstances.

Speaking of the involvement of civil society in this effort, **Mark Dowie, Chief Executive of the [Royal National Lifeboat Institution \(RNLI\)](#)**, said:

“As an organisation dedicated to saving lives on and around the water, we are thrilled to have supported Member States in efforts to secure a UN Global Drowning Prevention Resolution. A new UN international day for drowning prevention offers an annual, global opportunity for governments, water safety organisations, and the public to come together to recognise the preventability of drowning, and the positive, practical actions that all of us can take to keep individuals, families and communities safe”.

ENDS

28 April 2021

Notes for Editors:

- The General Assembly adopted draft resolution Global Drowning Prevention (document [A/75/L.76](#))
- WHO Global Report on Drowning (2014). WHO, Geneva, Switzerland. Available on-line at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/global-report-on-drowning-preventing-a-leading-killer>
- WHO Technical Report: Preventing drowning: an implementation guide (2017). WHO, Geneva, Switzerland. Available on-line at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/preventing-drowning-an-implementation-guide>

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ⁱ As estimated 2.5 million lives lost to drowning in the last 10 years based on WHO estimates.

ⁱⁱ World Health Organization, *Global Health Estimates, 2019*.

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