



27 June 2014 – The [human right to water](#) entitles everyone to sufficient and continuous water for personal and domestic uses. Water and sanitation services must be accessible to everyone, and the price of sanitation and water services must be affordable for all without compromising the ability to pay for other essential necessities guaranteed by human rights such as food, housing and health care.

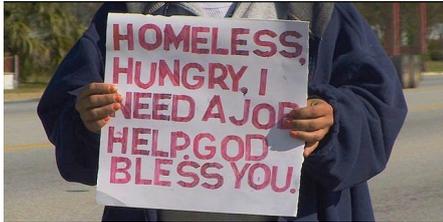
Detroit Michigan, once the heart of America's auto production, has been struck by hardship and has acutely suffered from the recession. In 2013, it became the largest US city to file for bankruptcy, crushed under an estimated debt of 18-20 million U.S. dollars. In the midst of this crisis, the city seems to have forgotten this very basic right to water.

Certain Detroit citizens are being cut off from [water](#) . Three UN experts on the human rights to water and sanitation, adequate housing, and extreme poverty and human rights [expressed concern](#)

Wednesday about reports of widespread water disconnections in the US city of Detroit of households unable to pay water bills.

“Disconnection of water services because of failure to pay due to lack of means constitutes a violation of the human right to water and other international human rights,” the experts said. “Disconnections due to non-payment are only permissible if it can be shown that the resident is able to pay but is not paying. In other words, when there is genuine inability to pay, human

rights simply forbids disconnections,” said Catarina de Albuquerque, the expert on the human right to water and sanitation.



The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department has been disconnecting water services from households which have not paid bills for two months, and has accelerated the process since early June, with the number of disconnections rising to around 3,000 customers per week. As a result, some 30,000 households are expected to be disconnected from water services over the next few months.

The extremely high poverty rate and massive unemployment in Detroit makes it impossible for many citizens to pay the relatively expensive water bill. Leilani Farha, the expert on the right to adequate housing, expressed concern that children are being removed by social services from their families and homes because, without access to water, their housing is no longer considered adequate. “If these water disconnections disproportionately affect African Americans they may be discriminatory, in violation of treaties the US has ratified,” Farha added.

According to international human rights law, it is the State’s obligation to provide urgent measures, including financial assistance, to ensure access to essential water and sanitation. “The households which suffered unjustified disconnections must be immediately reconnected,” the experts said.