

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes; the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

Ref.: AL SWE 2/2026
(Please use this reference in your reply)

20 February 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes; Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 54/10, 55/2 and 53/12.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **alleged human rights violations affecting individuals of the town of Kallinge and surrounding areas in Ronneby Municipality, southern Sweden, from contamination of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in their drinking water supply.**

According to the information received:

Kallinge is a locality situated in Ronneby Municipality, which is located in southern Sweden. The public water supply is managed by Ronneby Miljö och Teknik AB (Miljöteknik), a municipally owned company responsible for providing drinking water to urban areas within Ronneby Municipality, including Kallinge, Brantafors, and other surrounding communities.

PFAS contamination in the public water supply in Kallinge and broader Ronneby

In late 2013, Miljöteknik found that drinking water from Brantafors waterworks in Ronneby municipality contained very high levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The results of the samples showed that one of the municipality's two waterworks was very heavily contaminated, with PFAS concentrations reaching 10,380 ng/liter. In comparison, the EU's drinking water limit, in effect from 12 January 2026, is 500 ng/liter.¹ Kallinge's populace was particularly impacted due to the pathway of the contaminated waterwork and concentration of the population there.

PFAS is the collective name for a large group of fluorinated compounds that are used in a wide range of industrial, commercial and domestic applications, such as aerosol propellants; solvents; pesticides; antifoaming agents; levelling agents in paints, coatings and waxes; plastics; lubricants and greases; and fire-fighting

¹ European Union, Directive (EU) 2020/2184 on the quality of water intended for human consumption, annex 1, Part B Chemical parameters (16 December 2020).

foams. Standard water treatment processes are ineffective at removing these chemicals.

The PFAS contamination in Ronneby is linked to the fire training center at the Blekinge F17 air wing, located next to Kallinge. The Swedish Armed Forces used an oil-and-petrol firefighting foam containing PFAS, which seeped into the groundwater near the Brantafors waterworks, subsequently contaminating the drinking water of Kallinge in particular, but also other areas of Ronneby. In addition to use of the PFAS foam in the designated training area, the foam was used at more than 30 additional sites on the base, leading to uncontrolled releases into soil, groundwater and nearby streams. The firing of foam cannons was implemented daily for approximately 30 years in areas that drained directly into watercourses, without any collection or treatment of the toxic runoff, despite environmental operating authorizations (in place from 1995) explicitly requiring collection of all firefighting runoff. An internal Armed Forces inspection in 2011 reportedly identified serious deficiencies in environmental control and recommended PFAS testing, which was not implemented.

On 16 December 2013, Miljöteknik temporarily stopped deliveries of drinking water from Brantafors waterworks. However, information shows the subsequent resumption in delivery of contaminated drinking water, which continued into October 2014.

Between 2014 and 2016, a large number of residents in the area around Brantafors waterworks were determined to have high levels of PFAS in their blood. A group of affected individuals that later formed the PFAS Association and pursued legal action, showed blood contamination levels averaging 600 ng/ml, with the highest value reaching 1,800 ng/ml. The national average in Sweden is approximately 10 ng/ml, as highlighted by the Supreme Court judgement of 5 December 2023.² Children that had never directly consumed the contaminated water also showed high PFAS levels, with the substances apparently transferred from mothers with high PFAS levels during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

The Armed Forces' environmental investigations in February-March 2024 confirmed the extensive historic PFAS contamination from multiple parts of the base. Although the source of the contamination was traced to firefighting foam used by the Swedish Armed Forces, no compensation has been provided, nor has the State formally acknowledged responsibility to affected populations. Since 2017, members of the PFAS Association, founded by individuals in the affected population, have reported multiple cases of thyroid disease, cancer, and other symptoms consistent with PFAS contamination, including deaths.

The Ronneby PFAS Research Programme published a report³ in 2024 stating that Ronneby residents exposed to high levels of PFAS faced elevated risks to a range of health conditions, including osteoporosis-related fractures, diabetes, polycystic ovary syndrome, and language disorders in girls. The study also

² Supreme Court of Sweden, Judgment, Case No. 486-23, (5 December 2023).

³ Kristina Jakobsson and Christel Nielsen, Report 2024-03-05, *Ronneby PFAS Research Programme: A summary of research 2014 – 2023*.

identified increased risks for less common conditions, such as kidney cancer. Since PFAS can be transferred from mother to child during pregnancy and breastfeeding, the study emphasized that further research was needed to assess the risk and health impacts on the next generation of individuals exposed. In particular, the report said it was essential to follow children's development throughout their childhood in terms of both physical and brain development.

Access to effective remedies in the context of toxics

In 2016, over 150 residents of Ronneby Municipality – organized under the PFAS Association – brought a class-action lawsuit against the municipality utility Ronneby Miljö och Teknik AB (Miljöteknik). They sought a ruling from the District Court establishing the company's liability to compensate them for personal injury, under the Product Liability Act (1992:18). The appellants argued that they had suffered personal injury because the water supplied to them by Miljöteknik was defective, having been contaminated with PFAS.

The legal action culminated in the 2023 ruling by the Swedish Supreme Court that held that “the considerable physical deterioration manifested in the high level of PFAS in each appellant's blood must be regarded as constituting an impairment which is a personal injury for the purposes of tort law.”⁴ The Court also ruled that Miljöteknik must compensate the appellants for these injuries.

While the ruling was favorable, the legal process spanned more than a decade and exposed the plaintiffs to costs of up to 12 million SEK (approximately 1.2 million USD). The plaintiffs personally assumed this considerable financial risk and would have been liable for payment had they lost the case.

More than 300 new claims were submitted following the court ruling, however, an estimated 4,500 affected individuals have not initiated legal proceedings. This may be attributed to factors such as limited financial resources, lack of legal knowledge, physical or mental health challenges, or other personal circumstances. Among this group are approximately 1,000 affected people believed to be children under the age of 18, who can only initiate legal action through their parents or legal representatives, in accordance with chapter 6, section 2 of the Swedish Children and Parents Code and chapter 11 of the Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure.

On 9 October 2024, the PFAS Association of Kallinge submitted a formal claim for compensation to the Chancellor of Justice (Justitiekanslern), who represents the State in legal actions seeking damages. The applicants alleged that the State, through the operations of the Swedish Armed Forces at the Blekinge Air Wing (F17 airbase), had caused PFAS contamination in the local drinking water supply. This contamination allegedly resulted in personal injury to the claimants in the form of elevated levels of PFAS in the blood. The claim sought compensation in the amount of 100,000 SEK per individual, covering 145 residents affected by the contamination.

⁴ Supreme Court of Sweden, Judgment, Case No. 486-23, (5 December 2023), para. 31.

Information suggests that the Chancellor of Justice initially dismissed the applicants' claim on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired. The applicable ten-year period had commenced on 16 December 2013 and by October 2024, the claim was considered time-barred.⁵

Information shows that the PFAS Association, on behalf of the group of applicants, subsequently submitted new evidence indicating that the contamination persisted for nearly a year longer than previously claimed by the State. The information established that the municipal waterworks continued to supply PFAS-contaminated water until 10 October 2014. Since the compensation claims were filed on 9 October 2024, the ten-year statutory limitation period had apparently not expired.

In light of the new evidence submitted, the Chancellor of Justice reportedly concluded that there were sufficient grounds to reconsider the initial decision.⁶ According to available information, on 19 December 2025, the Swedish Armed Forces rejected responsibility for compensation before the Chancellor of Justice, arguing that the claim was prescribed because contaminated water was reportedly no longer supplied after 16 December 2013.

A final decision in case 2024/6643 is expected to be made by the Chancellor of Justice in the coming months.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we express our deep concern over the high levels of PFAS found in the blood of the population of the town of Kallinge, and more broadly in the municipality of Ronneby, in southern Sweden. The adverse effects that PFAS contamination has on human and environmental health stem from the hazardous characteristics and extreme persistence of this class of human-made chemicals.

We highlight, in particular, the serious implications of PFAS contamination for the right to a non-toxic environment, which is a key component of the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. The International Court of Justice has affirmed that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is essential for the realization of other human rights, and thus binding on States as a matter of international law.⁷

We are also deeply concerned that PFAS contamination allegedly resulting from the operations of the Swedish Armed Forces at the Blekinge air wing may be causing harmful effects not only in adults directly exposed, but also in children and newborns exposed in utero. This undermines the rights of present and future generations. Blood tests conducted on exposed individuals reveal that the local population is facing unjustified burdens on their right to health. Moreover, the reports and studies referenced above indicate that PFAS contamination may be contributing to serious health problems and even fatalities among those affected.

⁵ Sweden, Chancellor of Justice, *Claim for damages against the State due to PFAS contamination of drinking water*. Ref. No: 2024/6643, decision of 29 November 2024.

⁶ *Ibid.*, decision of 10 September 2025.

⁷ International Court of Justice, *Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change* (July 2025).

Furthermore, we are concerned that the judicial process in Sweden is resulting in excessively prolonged proceedings, the imposition of significant financial burdens on victims, the potential to time-bar victims' pursuit of justice, and exacerbation of the suffering of individuals affected by PFAS contamination. Although personal injuries have been acknowledged, the victims of the PFAS contamination have yet to receive adequate compensation and effective remedies.

A decision by the Chancellor of Justice to reject the victims' compensation claim on the grounds that the statute of limitations expired may entail non-implementation by the Chancellor of a judicial decision by the Supreme Court. According to international standards, it is the duty of all governmental and other institutions to respect and observe the independence of the judiciary. Judicial decisions by the courts are not subject to revision by other state entities. The decisions would only be subject to judicial review or to mitigation or commutation by competent authorities, in accordance with the law.

Overly short statutes of limitations may serve to obstruct access to justice in toxics cases, particularly given latency periods and the challenges associated with establishing causation and timely diagnosis. The Guidelines of the Special Rapporteur on access to justice and effective remedies in cases of toxic contamination (A/HRC/60/34) state that statutes of limitations should not impede access to justice, undermine the right to a fair trial, or result in impunity. Limitation periods in cases involving toxic exposures should be rendered inapplicable or extended to ensure that victims are not barred from seeking remedies before they could reasonably have become aware of the exposure, its effects and the knowledge or ability to act.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on whether the Swedish Government and the municipal utility company have acknowledged responsibility and/or issued an apology to individuals affected by PFAS contamination, and whether they have ensured access to adequate healthcare, financial compensation, legal assistance, and guarantees of non-repetition. If not, please explain why these measures have not yet been implemented.
3. Please provide information on whether environmental permit requirements, including obligations to collect and treat toxic runoff, are and were implemented, or if not, why not.
4. Please provide information on the actions and policies by your Excellency's Government to mitigate or prevent PFAS contamination in

the environment and populations, from the time the State became aware, or should reasonably have become aware, of the associated risks, in Ronneby Municipality.

5. Please provide information on any legislative or regulatory initiatives adopted by your Excellency's Government to strengthen the right of access to justice and an effective remedy, particularly in cases involving exposure to toxic substances such as PFAS. Please indicate any measures designed to address the specific complexities of such cases, including steps taken to render statutes of limitation inapplicable, to calculate limitation periods from the moment when victims knew or should have known of the harm or risks, and/or to extend applicable limitation periods to ensure victims' access to justice and effective remedies.
6. Please provide information on whether the Swedish Government has launched or funded any long-term research initiatives on exposure to PFAS, with the aim of advancing scientific knowledge of their harmful effects on health and to guarantee adequate healthcare for those affected by PFAS contamination.
7. Please provide information on the measures taken by your Excellency's Government to protect children, newborns and future generations from inherited PFAS contamination.
8. Please provide information on whether the Swedish Armed Forces have adopted any protocol, code of conduct, or other measures aimed at preventing the use of firefighting foams containing PFAS, or any other PFAS-containing materials, in current and upcoming military activities, in line with the recommendations outlined in the thematic report, *Military Activities and Toxics*.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes

Astrid Puentes Riaño
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Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we wish to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to obligations under international human rights instruments, to which Sweden is a party.

We wish to recall article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), that Sweden ratified on 6 December 1971, which guarantees the right to life. As highlighted by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 36, the duty to protect life also implies that States parties should take appropriate measures to address the general conditions in society that may give rise to direct threats to life or prevent individuals from enjoying their right to life with dignity, including degradation of the environment (para. 26). Environmental degradation, climate change and unsustainable development constitute some of the most pressing and serious threats to the ability of present and future generations to enjoy the right to life. Implementation of the obligation to respect and ensure the right to life, and in particular life with dignity, depends, inter alia, on measures taken by States parties to preserve the environment and protect it against harm, pollution and climate change caused by public and private actors (para. 62).

We also wish to refer to general comment No. 26 (CRC/C/GC/26) by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which states that children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is implicit in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and directly linked to, in particular, the rights to life, survival and development (article 6), to the highest attainable standard of health, including taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution (article 24) and the development of respect for the natural environment (article 29, para. 63). The Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights in his report *Gender and hazardous substances* (A/79/163), highlighted that adverse impacts on human rights of the release of hazardous substances into the environment disproportionately affect children and women.

Further, we wish to refer to article 24(2)(c) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires States to take appropriate measures to combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through *inter alia*, the provision of clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution.

We also recall to your Excellency that Sweden ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) on 6 December 1971. The right to health is protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (article 25(1)) and the CESCR (article 12) and it includes the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of both physical and mental health. The right to health also comprises the prevention and reduction of the population's exposure to harmful substances, such as harmful chemicals or other detrimental environmental conditions that directly or indirectly affect human health.

We also recall to your Excellency the explicit recognition of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation by the UN General Assembly (resolution 64/292) and the Human Rights Council (resolution 15/9), which derives from the right to an adequate standard of living, protected under, inter alia, article 25 of the UDHR, and article 11 of CESCR.

General comment No. 15 on the right to water stresses that the right to water “clearly falls within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living, particularly since it is one of the most fundamental conditions for survival” (para. 3), with the right to an adequate standard of living enshrined in article 11 of the CESCR, and that the right to water is also “inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of health” (para. 3) guaranteed under article 12(1). A sufficient and continuous water supply must be available for personal and domestic use, and “water is necessary to produce food (right to adequate food) and ensure environmental hygiene (right to health)” (para. 6).

Moreover, water required for each personal or domestic use must be safe, i.e., free from chemical substances that constitute a threat to a person’s health. Water facilities and services must be accessible to everyone, both physically and economically, and must be free from discrimination. Further, water accessibility includes the right to seek, receive, and impart information on water issues. Lastly, access to traditional water sources in rural areas, meaning the places and systems where the community has customarily obtained water for generations, should be protected from unlawful encroachment and pollution (para. 16(c)).

We wish to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 of 8 October 2021 and General Assembly resolution 76/300 of 29 July 2022, which recognize the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right. In this regard, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the 2024 report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a healthy environment (A/79/270) including an overview of the right, highlighting the obligation of States to respect, protect and fulfil the right to a healthy environment, including in relation to the right of everyone to enjoy a non-toxic environment in which to live, study and play, as well as the right to access to information, public participation and access to justice.

States have a duty to prevent exposure to hazardous substances and wastes, as detailed in the 2019 report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights implications of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes to the United Nations General Assembly (A/74/480). This obligation derives implicitly, but clearly, from a range of rights and duties enshrined in the global human rights framework, under which States are obliged to respect and fulfil recognized human rights, and to protect those rights, including from the consequences of exposure to toxic substances. These rights include the human rights to life, health, food and drinking water, a healthy environment, adequate housing and safe and healthy working conditions.

The former Special Rapporteur on the environment has identified non-toxic environments in which people can live, work, study and play as one of the six substantive elements of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as recognized by the Human Rights Council and General Assembly. In his report on the

topic, written in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, (A/HRC/49/53), he concluded that “the substantive obligations stemming from the right to a non-toxic environment require[s] immediate and ambitious action to detoxify people’s bodies and the planet. States must prevent toxic exposure by eliminating pollution, terminating the use or release of hazardous substances, and rehabilitating contaminated communities”. The Special Rapporteur has also recommended to “prohibit the production and use of substances that are highly toxic, bioaccumulative and persistent (including carcinogens, mutagens, endocrine disruptors, reproductive toxins, immune system toxins and neurotoxins) with limited exemptions where uses are essential for society”.

The Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment are detailed in the 2018 report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment (A/HRC/37/59). The principles provide that States must ensure a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment in order to respect, protect and fulfil human rights (principle 1) and must respect, protect and fulfil human rights in order to ensure a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (principle 2).

Framework principle 10 clarifies that States should provide for access to effective remedies for violations of human rights and domestic laws relating to the environment. This requires States to ensure that individuals have access to judicial and administrative procedures that meet basic requirements, including that the procedures: (a) are impartial, independent, affordable, transparent and fair; (b) review claims in a timely manner; (c) have the necessary expertise and resources; (d) incorporate a right of appeal to a higher body; and (e) issue binding decisions, including for interim measures, compensation, restitution and reparation, as necessary to provide effective remedies for violations.

In his thematic report on access to justice and effective remedies (A/HRC/60/34), the Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights highlighted the critical importance of full and timely compliance with judicial decisions in cases of toxic exposure. Judicial and administrative orders must be practicable and enforceable, and national courts must be empowered to oversee compliance with their decisions. Reparations must be comprehensive, incorporating interim measures of protection, due process guarantees, and remedies that go beyond compensation to include the cessation of pollution and the clean-up of contaminated areas – through the best available science and with victim participation.

In his thematic report, *Military Activities and Toxics* (A/80/174), the Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights noted that widespread contamination of PFAS is a persistent issue on military bases, largely due to the use of PFAS-containing firefighting foams in training and emergency situations. These substances do not biodegrade when they seep into the environment, including waterways. He emphasized that PFAS have been linked to serious health issues, including cancer and birth defects. Accordingly, the Special Rapporteur recommended that States ensure that post-contamination remedies include clean-up, victim assistance mechanisms and financial support for healthcare costs. The Special Rapporteur also recommended the expansion of healthcare infrastructure and the improvement of water, sanitation and waste management in communities affected by chemical contamination, while integrating

environmental monitoring and data-sharing between health and environmental authorities.

Framework principle 12 also establishes that States should ensure the effective enforcement of their environmental standards against public and private actors. This requires States to monitor and effectively enforce compliance with the standards by preventing, investigating, punishing and redressing violations of the standards by private actors as well as governmental authorities and to take effective steps to prevent corruption from undermining the implementation and enforcement of environmental laws.