July 28, 2020 marked a significant milestone in the fight to protect water. On that day 10 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly recognized water and sanitation as fundamental human rights.

Canada joined this international consensus in 2012, however, successive federal governments have failed to provide a framework or legislation to implement or enforce these rights. COVID-19 has made it even clearer that universal access to safe, clean water and adequate sanitation must be a reality to all.

The Council of Canadians has been integral in the advocacy at the international level to recognize the right to water and is working with water justice activists and communities across Canada and around the world to realize this right. With the help of Council chapters and supporters, we have been working to hold the federal government accountable to its commitment to end drinking water advisories by 2021, many communities are still on drinking water advisories while having to navigate government bureaucracy, band-aid solutions and inadequate funding for training, operations and maintenance.

**DANGEROUS LEVELS OF LEAD**

Last year, reports of dangerous quantities of lead in drinking water across major Canadian cities shone a spotlight on Canada’s aging water infrastructure and the uneven patchwork of drinking water standards across provinces. Meanwhile, municipalities and Indigenous communities are struggling to secure adequate funding to maintain and upgrade their water and wastewater infrastructure or services, many resorting to inefficient, costly and flawed public-private partnerships to fund their projects. The federal government, while having made encouraging investments in water infrastructure and services, is promoting water privatization through the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Ten years after the UN recognized the human rights to water and sanitation and eight years after Canada did, it’s time we fully implement this right at all levels of government. The federal government can take a leadership role by focusing its policies and resources to enshrine the human rights to water and sanitation into legislation. This means making sufficient investments to address the drinking water crisis in First Nations, putting in place and enforcing national drinking water standards, providing public funding for communities to repair and upgrade their water and sewage infrastructure and services, and working across jurisdictions to protect Canada’s freshwater. At the same time, the federal government must respect Indigenous rights and develop water policies with Indigenous nations as equal partners. These policies must uphold Indigenous titles, governance structure and law.

We are proud to stand alongside Council of Canadians’ members and supporters as we continue to protect every community’s right to access safe, clean drinking water and adequate sanitation.

Moving forward, we will build grassroots power and work with our chapters and allies to push for the implementation of the human rights to water and sanitation at the federal level. At the same time, we will continue to expand the network of communities committed to protecting water as a human right and commons across Canada and around the world through our Blue Communities Project.

We look forward to working with you all to make universal access to water and sanitation a reality.

**VI BUI** is the water campaigner for The Council of Canadians