University of Tehran
Office of the President

November 17, 2026

His Excellency Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations

United Nations Headquarters, New York, NY 10017, USA

Subject: Warning Against Attempts to Justify Attacks on Iran's Critical Water and Energy Infrastructure and the Risk of Further Violations of International Humanitarian Law

Excellency,
I am writing to draw your attention to an article published in *The New York Times* on November 16, 2026, entitled "War May Answer Long time Riddle of Iranian Dams Built for No Clear Reason." By comparing maps of Iran's dams and water-transfer infrastructure with locations targeted in airstrikes, the article advances the hypothesis that some of these water infrastructure projects may have been developed to support missile facilities.

As the article itself acknowledges, this hypothesis is not supported by direct or conclusive evidence. Rather, it is based primarily on geographical correlations and the interpretations of certain analysts. However, the same geographical overlap is equally compatible with an alternative and arguably more straightforward explanation: military facilities may have been established in areas where water, electricity, and road infrastructure already existed.

It is essential to recognize Iran's geographical and climatic realities in this discussion. Iran is predominantly an arid and semi-arid country, with average annual precipitation of approximately 240 millimeters —less than one-third of the global average. Much of the country faces severe water constraints, recurring droughts, and the growing consequences of climate change. Under such circumstances, the development of dams and water infrastructure for water storage and regulation, drinking-water supply, agricultural needs, and hydropower generation has been part of the country's response to legitimate developmental and climatic challenges.

This does not mean that every dam project is necessarily justified or exempt from independent economic, technical, and environmental scrutiny. However, the need to critically assess individual infrastructure projects must not be conflated with unsubstantiated allegations that their underlying purpose was military.

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My concerns are threefold:

First: The protection of essential civilian infrastructure under international humanitarian law

Drinking-water facilities, water distribution networks, and irrigation systems are indispensable to the survival and well-being of civilian populations. Rule 54 of customary international humanitarian law prohibits attacks against, or the destruction, removal, or rendering useless of, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Rule 42 also emphasizes the special care required when attacking works and installations containing dangerous forces, in order to prevent the release of such forces and consequent severe civilian losses.

In this context, Articles 54 and 56 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions also provide important legal frameworks for the protection of objects indispensable to civilian survival and installations containing dangerous forces. In particular, Article 56 establishes special protection for dams and dykes against attacks that may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequently result in severe civilian casualties, even where such installations may otherwise qualify as military objectives, subject to the conditions set out in that provision.

Second: The danger of turning unsubstantiated hypotheses into a justification for attacks

The publication and repetition of narratives that broadly associate critical water and energy infrastructure with military activities risk blurring the distinction between civilian objects and military objectives in public perception. It must be emphasized that geographical proximity, or an unverified analytical hypothesis does not, in itself, constitute a sufficient legal basis for targeting civilian infrastructure. In terms of actual water use, more than 95 percent of the water supplied from Iran's dams is used for agricultural and urban purposes, while only less than 5 percent is allocated to industrial uses.

Any assessment of the nature of an object and the legality of an attack must be based on specific and credible evidence and must comply with the applicable requirements of international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution.

Third: The humanitarian and environmental consequences of attacks on water and energy infrastructure

Damage to dams, water-transfer and treatment systems, electricity facilities, and related infrastructure can have consequences extending far beyond the immediate location of an attack, potentially affecting the lives of millions of people. In a country already facing severe water scarcity and recurring droughts, disruptions in access to safe drinking water and electricity could seriously have devastating consequences for public health, food security, agricultural production, and the livelihoods of millions of people. Such consequences would extend far beyond the immediate sites of destruction, potentially undermining essential public services and exposing civilian populations to prolonged humanitarian and environmental crises.

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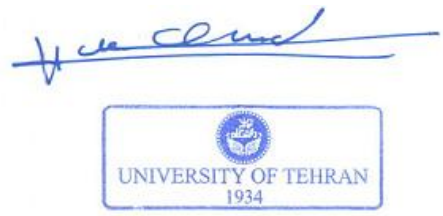
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In view of these serious concerns, it is respectfully expected that Your Excellency, in the exercise of your high office and in accordance with the responsibilities entrusted to you under the Charter of the United Nations, will give due consideration to the protection of Iran's critical water and energy infrastructure and take appropriate steps to ensure that the humanitarian consequences of any attacks on such facilities receive the necessary attention at the international level.

I further urge the United Nations to give due consideration to the humanitarian implications of attacks on Iran's critical water and energy infrastructure, to support appropriate international scrutiny of any such attacks, and to take all measures within its authority to help prevent further violations of international humanitarian law.

The protection of civilian lives and the infrastructure upon which their survival depends must remain beyond the reach of military expediency and political justification. It is a fundamental obligation under international humanitarian law and a responsibility that the international community cannot afford to disregard.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration,



Mohammad Hosein Omid,
Professor in Hydraulic Structures,
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