

Tuesday, July 6, 2010

Dear Excellencies,

I am writing all UN Ambassadors, permanent missions, and member states of the United Nations to seek your support for a very important initiative now taking place at the United Nations General Assembly concerning the human right to water and sanitation.

On June 17, a draft resolution declaring the human right to "safe and clean drinking water and sanitation" was presented by the Bolivian government in an informal consultation at the UN General Assembly. As you know, the resolution will be further developed by member states over the next several weeks, with the final text presented to the President of the General Assembly for tabling near the end of July, 2010.

This is the first time the General Assembly has been asked directly to deal with this issue and presents a huge test for the world. It is very important that many states co-sponsor this resolution and ultimately pass it with the current clear language. This issue touches the lives of billions every day and the world needs a clear signal that water is an issue of the highest priority.

When the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written, no one could foresee a day when water would be a contested area. But in 2010, it is not an exaggeration to say that the lack of access to clean water is the greatest human rights violation in the world. Nearly two billion people live in water-stressed areas and three billion have no running water within a kilometre of their homes. Every eight seconds a child dies of a water-borne disease, in every case preventable if their parents had access to clean water and if adequate sanitation was available. And it is getting worse as the world runs out of clean water. A new World Bank reports says that by 2030, global demand for water will exceed supply by 40 percent, a shocking prediction that foretells of terrible suffering.

For several years, international and local community groups fighting for water justice have been calling for the UN to recognize once and for all that water and sanitation are human rights. A right must be put in place that will ensure that no one will be denied water used for basic living needs because of an inability to pay, and that will codify that states have the obligation to deliver sufficient, safe, accessible and affordable water to their populations. The fact that water is currently not recognized as a human right has allowed decision-making over water policy to shift from the United Nations to institutions that are not accountable to member governments and do not adhere to UN norms.

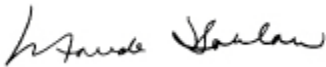
While this resolution respects the sovereignty of member states and is not binding, and while I still support a full covenant or treaty on the human right to water and sanitation, it is nevertheless a crucial step forward in the realization of clean water for all. I want to be clear that I also strongly support the work of Catarina de Albuquerque, the Independent Expert examining the issue for the Human Rights Council, and that this resolution will strengthen her efforts and the attention they receive.

In 2008/2009, I had the privilege of serving as Senior Advisor on Water to the 63rd President of the United Nations General Assembly. In that capacity, I met with many senior UN officials working in the various agencies that deal with water. They shared with me their desire to see more political cohesion in the responses of the UN to the world water crisis and expressed a great need for political direction for their work from the heart of the UN - the General Assembly. In the year I served as advisor, I observed growing support from member countries for such a resolution and a growing expectation from civil societies around the world that the right to water will one day soon be seen as a cornerstone of UN policy.

I am writing to urge UN member states to do all they can to support this resolution including acting as a co-sponsor in this far-sighted and courageous endeavour. **The time has come to declare basic water and sanitation to be a human right and to give hope to the billions without adequate access to them now.**

The whole world is watching.

Sincerely,



Maude Barlow

National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians

Former Senior Advisor on Water to the President of the United Nations General Assembly

Chair of the Board of Food and Water Watch