

BLUE PLANET PROJECT

A PLAN OF ACTION TO PROTECT THE GLOBAL WATER COMMONS

Background

The international citizens' movement against corporate globalization has rightly identified the private assault on the world's freshwater as a crucial threat to humanity and the earth. Just as we are beginning to understand the terrifying dimensions of the depletion, diversion and destruction of this finite resource, powerful transnational corporations are moving in to take advantage of the coming water crisis.

It is their intention to commodify the water systems of the earth. Some are startlingly open; the decline in fresh water supplies and standards has created a wonderful venture opportunity for water corporations and their investors, they boast. The agenda is clear; water should be treated like any other tradeable good, with its use determined by the principles of profit.

Private water companies are aggressively working with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to force developing countries to privatize water services. They are also using international trade agreements like the World Trade Organization and the Free Trade Area of the Americas to take down domestic laws that restrict their access to water now protected by nation-states. Private corporations have enormous clout with the United Nations and have worked closely with the UN and the World Bank to take control of the World Water Forum, a powerful water-policy think tank made up of governments, international financial institutions and professional water associations.

Given free rein by governments intent on deregulation and global competition, these water corporations are leading the global dialogue on what to do about the world's water crisis. Price water, they say in chorus; put it up for sale and let the market determine its future. For them, the debate is closed. Water, says the World Bank and the United Nations, is a "human need," not a "human right." These are not semantics; the difference in interpretation is crucial. A human need can be supplied many ways, especially for those with money. No one can sell a human right.

So far, most of this activity has taken place without public consultation or public input. The assumption has been made by the powerful forces of governments and their corporate sector that the debate is over; "everyone" agrees to the commodification of water. And yet, no-one has yet really given the world's citizens the opportunity to debate the hard political questions about water.

It is time for the citizens of the world to take charge of this debate before it is too late. There is an urgent need for a global plan of action based on the belief that water belongs to the earth and all species and is a fundamental human right. We at the Blue Planet Project are calling for the launch of an international campaign – rooted in the twin foundations of conservation and equity – to keep water as part of the global commons. This campaign must start now and take root in every country and society in the world.

The Treaty Initiative

While there are many steps to be taken to protect and restore the earth's freshwater sources, we believe that the most important tool to keep it from being privatized is a treaty initiative to be adopted by organizations and governments around the world. Those who sign it agree to maintain water as a global commons for all time and pledge to actively do all they can to protect it.

The treaty, drafted by Jeremy Rifkin and Maude Barlow, was launched at the Council of Canadian's Summit, *Water for People and Nature*, that took place in Vancouver, Canada, on July 4-8, 2001, and was unanimously endorsed by 1000 delegates from 40 countries. It was also endorsed by the over 100 NGOs and social movements who attended the December 2001, meeting of the *Our World is Not For Sale Network* in Brussels.

THE TREATY INITIATIVE TO SHARE AND PROTECT THE GLOBAL WATER COMMONS

We proclaim these truths to be universal and indivisible:

That the intrinsic value of the Earth's fresh water precedes its utility and commercial value, and therefore must be respected and safeguarded by all political, commercial and social institutions,

That the Earth's fresh water belongs to the earth and all species and therefore, must not be treated as a private commodity to be bought, sold and traded for profit,

That the global fresh water supply is a shared legacy, a public trust and a fundamental human right and, therefore, a collective responsibility, and,

Whereas, the world's finite supply of available fresh water is being polluted, diverted and depleted so fast that millions of people and species are now deprived of water for life and,

Whereas governments around the world have failed to protect their precious fresh water legacies,

Therefore, the nations of the world declare the Earth's fresh water supply to be a global commons, to be protected and nurtured by all peoples, communities and governments of all levels and further declare that fresh water will not be allowed to be privatized, commodified, traded or exported for commercial purpose and must immediately be exempted from all existing and future international and bilateral trade and investment agreements.

The parties to this treaty - to include signatory nation states and Indigenous Peoples - further agree to administer the Earth's fresh water supply as a trust. The signatories acknowledge the sovereign right and responsibility of every nation and homeland to oversee the fresh water resources within their borders and determine how they are managed and shared. Governments all over the world must take immediate action to declare that the waters in their territories are a public good and enact strong regulatory structures to protect them. However, because the world's fresh water supply is a global commons, it cannot be sold by any institution, government, individual or corporation for profit.

For more information or to join the treaty initiative visit the Blue Planet Project web site at www.blueplanetproject.net or email blueplanet@canadians.org

Campaign Plan

Launch

We are proposing that the Treaty, which has already been translated into French, Spanish and Portuguese and can be found on the Council of Canadian's Blue Planet website, be launched internationally on World Water Day, March 22, 2002. We propose that as many communities as possible hold activities on World Water Day and launch the treaty initiative as their central platform. We encourage everyone to let us know ahead of time of your plans, so that we can coordinate activities and share the information with others. The bigger we can make this launch, obviously, the more clout we will have with governments and international institutions.

Each country would then undertake a campaign to have its government adopt the treaty. The aim is to put pressure on all of our governments as they prepare for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10) to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, August 26th to September 4th 2002. Essentially, in every country and starting immediately, governments must be pressured to agree to adopt the Treaty when it is presented by our citizens' movement in Johannesburg. As well, work must begin immediately to get the support of other NGOs that will be attending the Summit and build toward a global civil society adoption of the principles behind it.

Rio+10

Many observers are expecting a powerful push at the World Summit on Sustainable Development by the World Bank, the WTO, cash-strapped governments, and the United Nations, prompted by corporate interests, to turn to the private sector for the answers of the world's environmental problems. Citing massive failure to accomplish the goals set out at the first Rio Summit, many key players are likely to declare that governments are just not up to the task of cleaning up the world's pollution and will call upon the private sector to step up to the plate.

Water is one of two "official" themes of the Summit, and we know that the water companies, the World Bank and others, will be using the Summit to aggressively promote the commodification of water. It is imperative that there be an alternative vision for the world's water future at Rio+10, and the international civil society movement must provide that vision.

Water is a very important issue in South Africa; its unequitable distribution a tragedy. It appears that the politics of water injustice will be recreated at the Summit, which is to be held in the wealthy suburb of Sandton - the Third World's richest large suburb. The South African government is building a gargantuan luxurious complex for the Summit that will include shopping malls, exclusive restaurants and movie theatres. But Sandton, with its huge estates with English gardens and swimming pools, is right next door to Alexandra Township, one of the poorest communities on the African Continent. Between the two runs a river so polluted, it has cholera-warning signs along its banks.

The global citizens' water movement must stand with the people of South Africa and around the world. We must be ready to counteract this move to have Rio+10 give its approval to a process of commodification of the world's freshwater supplies. The Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons is designed to be the primary focus of a fightback on this front. It states in clear terms that water is a public good and a human right and must not be appropriated for profit. It asks that, in signing, government organizations and Indigenous Peoples agree to administer the world's water as a trust.

World Water Forum

Another target for the Treaty Initiative is the Third World Water Forum to be held in Kyoto, Japan, in March of 2003 and the prep-con to take place in the same city a year earlier. At the Second World Water Forum held in The Hague in March 2000, over 5,000 participants were told by World Bank and United Nations officials that the privatization argument was over. Only the hard work of the NGO community there and the Blue Planet Project members - including grassroots environmentalists and human rights activists working with public sector unions and Public Services International - prevented the entire Summit from adopting a private future for water. We can be sure the same water and energy corporations who were so visible in The Hague will be present in stronger numbers in Kyoto.

For the global citizens' movement to be ready to challenge such a powerful body with a totally different mandate is a formidable prospect indeed. Yet, it is absolutely necessary to do so. In fact, the Fourth World Water Forum is scheduled for Montreal, Canada, in March, 2006, giving the movement a five-year target to turn the dominant global water agenda around. Planning must start immediately on how to bring large numbers of like-minded groups to these meetings, how to get the movement's issues and perspectives on the agenda, and how to enlist the support of the vast majority of the delegates to these meetings who share the view that water is part of the global commons and would join in a citizens' campaign if given the opportunity.

It must be a key goal that, by the Fourth World Water Forum, the tide of opinion will have changed and governments and the United Nations will be working with citizens' organizations to announce the adoption of the Water Commons Treaty and the creation of a Global Water Convention.

Conclusion

The world has recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration marked a turning point in the long international quest to assert the supremacy of human and citizen rights over political or economic tyranny of any kind. Together with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Declaration stands as a 21st century Magna Carta. Besides granting full human rights to every person on earth regardless of race, religion, sex, and many other criteria, the Declaration includes the rights of citizenship, those services and social protections that every citizen has a right to demand of his or her government.

Yet more than a half-century later, the lack of access to clean water means that well over one billion people are being denied a right guaranteed them in the United Nations Declaration. Over those 50 years, the rights of private capital have grown exponentially, while the rights of the world's poor have fallen off the political map. It is no coincidence that the deterioration and depletion of the world's water systems has taken place concurrent with the rise in the power of transnational corporations and a global financial system in which communities, indigenous peoples and farmers have been disenfranchised.

An ecologically-sound, water-sustainable future will not happen if the world's water is privatized and put on the open market for sale to the highest bidder. If citizens lose control of this precious commons, we will lose the ability to set the conditions under which freshwater can be preserved and equitably shared.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Those groups who are part of the Blue Planet Project and other organizations fighting for a water-secure future believe in the beauty of this dream: that our global water crisis will become the source of global peace; that finally humanity will bow before nature and learn to live at peace with our limits and one another; that through our work together, the peoples of the world will declare that the sacred waters of life are the common property of the earth and all species and commit to their preservation for all generations to come. We believe that the Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons is a key step in realising our dream.

The Blue Planet Project is an initiative of the Council of Canadians to support an international network opposed to the privatization and commodification of the world's fresh water. Its' first project was bringing like-minded groups together for the Second World Water Forum where non-governmental organisations, civil society groups, and trade unions were pivotal in raising international awareness to the privatization agenda of the World Bank and the world's water corporations. In July 2001, The Blue Planet Project organised: "Water for People and Nature: A Forum on Conservation and Human Rights". Held in Vancouver, Canada from July 5-8, over 1000 activists and experts from more than 40 countries met to propose a new future for water, one based on respect for the earth and human rights.

For more information on The Blue Planet Project or to get involved in international World Water Day activities visit www.blueplanetproject.net or email blueplanet@blueplanetproject.net