

"... whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple -- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42)

In 1966, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights established the right to water as a human right in Articles 11 and 12.

In 1999, the Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment established four principles that have subsequently guided world water policy: (1) fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource; (2) water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy makers at all levels; (3) women play a central role in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water; (4) water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.

In 2001, 800 delegates from 35 countries attended the Water for Peace and Nature Summit in Vancouver. They endorsed and signed the "Treaty Initiative To Share and Protect the Global Water Commons," which includes the following:

"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 water belongs to the Earth and all species, and therefore must be 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."

2008.

Water: A Global Challenge, The Journal of International Affairs, 61:2, Spring/Summer, 2008.

Water Incorporated; The Commodification of the World's Water, Maude Barlow, Earth Island Journal, March 5, 2002.

Prepared by:

Ms. Hellen Grace Akwii Wangusa
The Anglican Observer at the United Nations

The Rev. Canon Jeff Golliver, Ph.d.,
Program Director for the Environment and Sustainable Development

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Notes

**For Advocacy and
Education on Water**

have access to centralized water systems are counted, when the water is so polluted that it is unsafe to drink. Also, statistics do not take into account aging and decrepit infrastructure throughout the world that is in desperate need of repair. They do not take into account or value traditional practices and beliefs that maintain natural water sources, regulate its use, and set cultural rules for extractions of its resources, such as fish.

What the Churches Can Do

- * Church leaders, lay and ordained, must speak directly to government representatives on all levels -- local, regional, and national -- about the right to safe, clean water and preserving that right as a basic public trust.
- * Use the water in your baptismal font both as a sacrament and as an educational tool linking spiritual teachings, environmental stewardship, and basic human rights.
- * Invite women in your congregation to share their experience about the significance of water, its uses, and the issues surrounding it.
- * Visit nearby wells, streams, and rivers with your congregations and communities to bless the water.
- * Implement water conservation strategies in your parish church or other places of worship.

Suggested References

Blue God: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water, Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, The New Press, 2002.

Blue Planet Run: The Race to Provide Safe Drinking Water to the World, Rick Smolan and Jennifer Erwit, The Blue Planet Foundation,

The Water Crisis

1.1 billion people worldwide lack access to clean water.

1.8 million children die each year from waterborne diseases -- one every 10 seconds.

5.3 billion people, two thirds of the world's population, will suffer from water shortages by 2050.

The average American family uses 293 gallons of water per day; the average African family uses 5 gallons.

Global consumption of water doubles every 20 years -- more than twice the rate of human population growth.

Water and Development Assistance

In order to meet the Millennium Development Goal goals, over 80 million people per year need to gain access to water and over 120 million per year need access to sanitation over the period 2005-2015. But even if these targets are met, there will still be some 900 million people lacking access to safe drinking water and 1.3 billion lacking access to improved sanitation in 2015 (Commission on Sustainable Development, 8 February, 2008, Report of the Secretary-General, p.4).

In real terms, water and sanitation aid levels in 2005 were lower than in 1997, a marked contrast to education, whose aid commitments doubled over the same period, and a contrast to aid commitments in health as well. Moreover, aid for water and sanitation has fallen as a

share of overall development assistance. It declined from 8 to 5 percent, even though the important role of water and sanitation in meeting other development goals is clearly recognized (Commission on Sustainable Development, 8 February, 2008, Report of the Secretary-General, p.19).

Water: A Right or a Need?

Fortune Magazine recently reported that "water promises to be to the 21st century what oil was the 20th century." Maude Barlow, writing in Earth Island Journal, says that "who owns water and how much they are able to charge for it will become the question of the century. The privatization of water is already a \$400 billion-a-year business. Multinational corporations hope to increase profits from water commodification even further by using international trade and investment agreements to control its flow and supply. One Canadian water company, Global Water Corp., puts it best: Water has moved from being an endless commodity that may be taken for granted to a rationed necessity that may be taken by force."

While it is obviously true that we need water for basic survival, recent attempts to categorize water as a "need," rather than a "right" have been legal attempts to justify privatization -- that is to say, companies claim that their mission is to fulfill this basic "need." This is misleading at best. Water is the most basic constituent of life. 70% of the human body is composed of water, and it is found in the earth in an equal proportion. Without water, the web of life would not exist. Water is a natural right -- it should not be owned, privatized, bought or sold. The stewardship of water is a sacred trust and responsibility that we all share.

Women and Water

"Domestic water issues are framed in contexts of social rights and welfare, health and hygiene, and basic needs and in the context of women's responsibilities for social reproduction. This includes the unpaid work within the household that is carried out almost exclusively by women and that is central to the development of families, communities, and ultimately, nations" ("Water: A Global Challenge," Bennett et.al., 2008).

It is estimated that women in many developing countries walk for an average of about 6 kilometers each day to collect water ("Water: A Critical Resource," United Nations Population Fund, New York, 2002).

Agriculture is the most widespread use for water. Despite the critical role that women play in reducing food insecurity, through their knowledge of crop production, local biodiversity, soils and local water resources, they are often excluded from decision-making processes in new water management initiatives. This means they have no choice in the kind or location of services they receive ("Gender and Water," The International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2007).

Water and the Millennium Development Goals

By 2015, reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. Target -- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Although official figures in support of the Millennium Development Goals sometimes show an increase in the number of people that have access to safe, clean water in the last few years, this assessment can be misleading. For example, households which