

WATER FOR ALL

Religious Working Group on Water

When the poor and needy seek water, I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. -- Isaiah 41: 17-18

The *Religious Working Group on Water*, with participation by a broad range of faith-based organizations, institutions, communities and agencies, calls on U.S. policy makers and inter-governmental institutions to work to ensure universal, sustainable access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use. Water is a gift from God to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all people and the wider creation.

As faith-based organizations in the United States many of us partner with local communities throughout the world in their efforts to achieve the sustainable provision of safe, affordable water. Through our work we have seen that the crisis in water and sanitation hits the poor hardest. We lament the fact that those who can least afford it pay disproportionately more for water.

In view of the vast wealth of the United States, the U.S. government has both the capacity and the imperative to fully commit itself and its resources to exercising global leadership to ensure safe, affordable water for all members of the human community.

The need for adequate drinking water and sanitation is great. Around 1.2 billion people do not have access to safe water and 2.5 billion do not have access to improved sanitation. Two million children die each year from infections spread by dirty water and lack of access to decent sanitation. On average women in developing countries walk nearly four miles each day to fetch water. Clean water is key to every other aspect of development -- from children's education to economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include the call to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015. But according to a 2006 World Health Organization report, the world is in danger of missing MDG targets for providing clean water and sanitation unless there is a dramatic increase in the pace of work and investment between now and 2015.

As people of faith, we affirm that water is a public trust and global public good. It is a misuse of God's creation to deny or improperly restrict access to clean water. Governments' have a duty to ensure that all individuals have affordable, equitable access to water and that no one because of financial constraints is cut off from sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use.

The Religious Working Group on Water calls for U.S. Government action in four vital areas:

- Substantially increase Development Assistance Account funding for clean drinking water and adequate sanitation – as part of an overall increase in U.S. development assistance for sustainable human development and poverty alleviation world-wide. U.S. funding should increase – and not undermine -- the capacity of developing-country governments and local communities to manage water resources and to formulate and implement policies that expand access to safe water and sanitation in an affordable, equitable and sustainable manner.
- Ensure that water projects of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank prioritize access to the most impoverished people and communities, and that IFI policies respect and ensure sustainable and affordable access for all people. Ensure that IFIs respect the right of

countries to democratically determine their own water policies, and reject lending conditions that pre-empt such country decisions, for example, by requiring water privatization or similar policies.

- Oppose irresponsible and unjust practices of extractive industries that drain scarce water resources for profit and pollute clean water sources. Support the right of peoples to control their natural resources, protect their health and environment and maintain their communities and way of life.
- Fully support the human right to water, which for people of faith is rooted in God's gift of water to all people, and which entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

Water is a symbol of life. The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God's grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation (Gen 2:5ff). It is a basic condition for all life on Earth (Gen 1:2ff.) and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation (Rom 8:19 ff., Rev 22). As churches, we are called to participate in the mission of God to bring about a new creation where life in abundance is assured to all (John 10:10; Amos 5:24). It is therefore right to speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat. – from the World Council of Churches' *Statement on Water for Life*, Feb. 2006.

Water is a primary building block of life. . . The Bible opens precisely with the image of the divine spirit hovering over the water at the creation of the universe. In the accounts of creation contained in the first two chapters of the Bible, it is from the midst of the waters that dry land is made to appear, while living reptiles and rich life forms are made to swarm the waters. It is also water that moistens the earth for other forms of life to appear. . . . The management of water and sanitation must address the needs of all, and particularly of persons living in poverty. Inadequate access to safe drinking water affects the well being of over one billion persons and more than twice that number have no adequate sanitation. This all too often is the cause of disease, unnecessary suffering, conflicts, poverty and even death. -- from *A Contribution of the Delegation of the Holy See on the Occasion of the Third World Water Forum* (Kyoto, 16th-23rd March 2003) by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

ENDORSERS:

Africa Faith and Justice Network
Brethren Witness/Washington Office,
Church of the Brethren
Columban Justice, Peace & Integrity of
Creation Office (USA)
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Church World Service
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Food & Water Watch*
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ
and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Institute Justice Team
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Justice, Peace/Integrity of Creation Office,
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Lifewater International
Lutheran World Relief
Maryknoll Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice

Mennonite Central Committee –
Washington Office
National Council of Churches USA
NETWORK: A Catholic Social Justice Lobby
PLANT (Partners for the Land and Agricultural
Needs of Traditional Peoples)
Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office
Quixote Center
SHARE Foundation: Building a New
El Salvador Today
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
Justice and Peace Network
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United Church of Christ
Justice & Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of
Church and Society
Washington Office on Africa

Asterisked organizations do not self-identity as
“faith-based.”