

## Pablo Solón's transcript from *Shout Out for Global Justice!*

June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010 - Massey Hall, Toronto

First of all, I think you [the MC who introduced Solón] have made a mistake. I am not the ambassador to the U.S., I am the ambassador to the UN, because we have kicked out the U.S. ambassador in Bolivia and we don't have an ambassador in the United States.

You know I met Maude Barlow and Vandana Shiva about 10 years ago. I remember it very well because it was at a meeting in Geneva after the water wars in Cochabamba in Bolivia, after we expelled the Bechtel corporation that was privatizing the water.

In those days I was a water warrior, now I am a water warrior ambassador. And now I only have a new possibility, that is to continue the fight we began more than 10 years ago. We have discussed very much with Maude, with Vandana and many of you, that there is something that we must do: We have to have water declared as a human right in the UN.

We have declared in the UN the right to food, the right to health, the right to education, the right to shelter, the right to development – but not the right to water. And we all know that without water we can't live. So nobody can argue that it is not a basic and fundamental and universal human right, but despite this it has not been, until now, recognized as a human right.



Council of Canadians

Pablo Solón, June 25, 2010, Toronto.

### **Water is a Human Right**

So we have presented, two weeks ago, a draft resolution, so that this coming month, in July, we expect to have a vote in the General Assembly of the United Nations. And we want to see which countries are going to vote against that resolution, we want to vote to see which governments are going to say to humanity that water is not a human right. We want to expose, like sometimes you have to expose vampires, to public opinion.

Ten years ago we needed your help and you gave it to us. It was after the water war, when we expelled Bechtel, Bechtel sued Bolivia. They presented a demand to this arbitration panel of the

World Bank. It was a demand for \$30 to \$100-million, even though they were only in Bolivia for six months. And, with a global campaign, we managed to have Bechtel at the end of five years saying 'we are going to give up our demand, we are going to sell you everything.' And they sold us everything for one dollar.

Why were we able to do that? Because in California, in Washington, in New York, here in Canada, in Europe – all around the world – activists, trade unions, social movements, NGOs, began to mobilize and say 'it is unjust to put a suit against Bolivia for \$30 to \$100-million for the right of Bolivians to decide what they are going to do with their water service system in the city of Cochabamba.'

Now we need your support again. Because this resolution that declares the human right to water is not going to pass if we don't build a global mobilization around the whole world, in Canada, in the United States, in Europe. We are discussing one of the key issues and it is necessary to have and to build this global political coalition now, and to act very strongly in the coming days. So, we are counting on you.

### **Struggle Against Privatization**

After the water war, for Bolivia, that was a very important moment. Because until the water war, we had lost all the battles in the social movements. We lost the battle against the privatization of social security, the battle against the privatization of the energy system, the privatization of gas, the privatization of railways, but when we won this battle against the privatization of water we said 'we can do it.'

And we began to strengthen forces, the indigenous people, who are the majority in my country, came together with social movements, trade unions and we said 'now we have to recover our natural resources' that had been privatized, if we want to have another future.

And a big movement was built in order to nationalize the gas and oil company that was privatized. Before, when it was privatized, 82 per cent of the revenues went to the companies and only 18 per cent to the state.

So we built a movement and we realized that in order to accomplish the nationalization of the gas and oil company we also had to take control of the government. We had to nationalize our government.

And, after an election, an historic election, in the year 2005, President Evo Morales, with what we call the political instrument of the social movements, won for the first time with 54 per cent of the votes.

Four months later, on May 1, we nationalized the gas and oil company. And when we nationalized it, then we said, 'now 82 per cent is going to be for the state and only 18 is going to be for the foreign investor.'

And they told us everybody's going to run out, nobody is going to stay to administer that, but in the end we renegotiated 42 contracts under these new rules because even with 18 per cent they have profits. And we have 82 [per cent].

You know they have the G8/G20 model, but we have another model. If we take control, as a society, of our companies, of our resources, we can have enough money, first, to create more employment. In Bolivia, employment hasn't decreased, it has increased. We have raised salaries, we have increased social benefits. Why was it possible? Because we control, now, the economic power of the country, not the corporations.

And we don't have a fiscal deficit, we have a surplus. So there are two models, and this is the discussion that should have taken place. It's not a discussion between stimulus package and austerity, between Europe and the United States, it's a discussion between the society taking control of the economy, or the corporations. That is the main discussion. And the example of Bolivia shows that it's possible. It is possible.

### **Social Movements Respond**

So for us, the main thing, our main lesson is that every time there is a problem we need to appeal to the people, to the social movements. For us, when we had this problem in Copenhagen, where they tried to impose this Copenhagen Accord – I remember it, at 3 o'clock in the morning, I was there. We said what are we going to do? Let's call for a people's world conference on climate change and Mother Earth rights. Because if we have to have a response, it has to be with the social movements of the world.

And between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of April, we had this people's conference and we discussed, what are we going to do? That's the key: what is our agenda? We know what their agenda is. What's our agenda?

And we said, 'there is a problem here.' The problem is really very big with climate change. Because if emissions are not reduced in the short-term, not in the long-term, the temperature is going to rise – right now it's more than 0.78 or 0.79 degrees more than it was in the pre-industrial era – if this keeps on we will see two, three degrees increase, four, five.

And what does that mean? Our glaciers are going to melt, Africa is going to burn, some island states are going to be beneath the ocean, food production is going to be reduced by about 40 per cent, depending on how much the temperature increases.

And we only have these coming decades to act. Each year we lose is something like 35 or 40 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> that is thrown into the atmosphere. So we need to act fast.

And we said in this people's world conference, we want to have a reduction of 50 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, in a domestic way, without market mechanisms, without offset mechanisms, approved in the next negotiation on climate change that's going to take place in

Cancun, Mexico. And this is key. If we are not on board on this issue, we, our children, our grandchildren, are going to have a very bleak future. We must engage in this key issue if we want to change the future.

But another issue that is very important for us is the issue of Mother Earth rights. Why is this so important for us? Because in their agenda, what they say is that they have failed because privatization hasn't gone further, to nature. So now is the time to privatize even nature – carbon markets, carbon rights, environmental services, water.

And we say *No!*, the alternative is not that, it's precisely the opposite. We must recognize that there are things, beings, that cannot be commodified, that have rights as we have rights.

So we have presented, in the UN, a draft proposal of a resolution on the Declaration of the Universal Rights of Mother Earth – the right to live, the right to regenerate its biocapacity. That for us is key, it is the key thing of this century. That is why we have begun to build a movement to defend Mother Earth.

As [the MC] said, you are now all part of the Council of Canadians. I can say that you are now all part of the global movement for Mother Earth.

Just to finish with one very important message. What are we going to do with this plan of security, of authoritarianism, militarism. What is our alternative? We have also discussed this in Bolivia, and we said we must promote a global referendum, a worldwide referendum. We must call not G20, not only 'G192' – that is, the General Assembly of the UN, very important – but we have to call this 6 billion that Vandana [Shiva] was speaking about. A global referendum where we can ask the people: Do you agree, in the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent? Do you agree with Mother Earth rights? Do you agree that military budgets should be redirected to solve climate change issues and not to promote war?

So the key thing, against authoritarianism, is democracy. Global democracy, all around the world. Thank you very much. •

*Pablo Solón is the Bolivian ambassador to the United Nations and lead negotiator for Bolivia at the December 2009 climate conference in Copenhagen.*