

AGAINST THE CURRENT: CANADA BUCKS GLOBAL RIGHT TO WATER

In the recent federal election, Canadians clearly rejected the agenda of the right and voted for the promise of a progressive agenda from Paul Martin's Liberals. Early reports on the Martin government's support for bank mergers and missile defence have given Canadians reason to be sceptical.

A key test for the Martin government will be whether or not they are prepared to recant their opposition to the declaration of water as a human right. Just over two years ago, the Liberal government embarrassed Canada by making our country the only one to vote against water as a human right at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Of the 53 countries on the committee, only Canada, a country that has immense reserves of fresh water, voted no to declaring the human right to water.

Any doubt that our government is out of touch with the values of ordinary Canadians and with our historic international role was erased with this vote.



On April 24, Maude and Victoria Setshedi (a water warrior from South Africa) spoke at a protest against the 60th Anniversary of the World Bank in Washington.

Photo: Orin Langelle

Ninety-seven per cent of Canadians believe that water should be recognized as a human right (see page 5). It is inconceivable to most Canadians that our country could take a stance of denying this most fundamental of human rights.

Around the world, 1.2 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water. Every year over 2 million people, mostly young children, die from preventable diarrhea contracted from drinking unsafe water. The crisis is growing, and if countries like Canada stand in the way of securing the human right to water, it will continue to grow as the privatization and commodification of water increases.

This is why the Blue Planet Project is working with our partner groups around the world to secure an International Convention on the Right to Water. We believe that a strong international legal instrument would greatly assist in ensuring that as water becomes even more scarce, it is not turned into a commodity for profit.

If access to water is based on ability to pay, then we condemn the poor to disease and risk of death because of their poverty. Water is fundamental to life, for both people and nature. There is no reason that this should not be reflected in an international convention.

Recently the movement to secure a water convention has been getting stronger and more organized. The Council has taken a lead in championing this issue at various international events. This year alone, from the People's World Water Forum in Delhi and the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India, to the Commission on Sustainable Development

meeting at the UN in New York, the Council has been promoting the idea of an international convention on the right to water.

We are proud to work with organizations such as Bread for the World (Germany), Third World Network (Malaysia), Women's Environment and Development Organization (U.S.A.), and the Swiss Coalition of Development Organizations, among others, to promote this initiative internationally.

Last year was the UN International Year of Freshwater; now the UN has proclaimed 2005 to 2015 as the International Decade for Action – Water for Life. Clearly, the issue of water is one of the most critical facing us.

Every day people suffer and die because they cannot access clean, safe water. We must not allow this to continue. The danger is that an abhorrent situation will get worse as water is increasingly mined for profit. Our goal is to stop this dangerous trend so that everyone has access to water. The challenge is to deliver safe water to everyone, and we must do everything we can to meet that challenge.

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