



WATER FIGHT!

WHEN ACTIVISTS AND PRIVATEERS CONVERGE AT THE WORLD WATER FORUM IN MEXICO CITY, WHOSE AGENDA WILL PREVAIL?

When the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted over 50 years ago, water was not included in the list of protected rights. The rationale was simple. Water, like air, was considered so fundamental to life that naming a right to it would have been redundant.

Times have changed.

Despite the everyday dependence we have on water, access to fresh water is

far from equal or guaranteed. Of the world's population of 6 billion, at least 1.5 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water and another 4 billion lack adequate sanitation services. In some parts of the developing world, a child dies every 15 seconds due to easily preventable water-related diseases.

On the international stage, private water companies have co-opted terms like "the right to water," attempting to exploit a global need to line their pockets. But water privatization has failed so many times that countries like Bolivia and Uruguay have declared that water is not a commodity and

must be delivered by a public, not-for-profit system.

When thousands of people converge at the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City from March 16 to 22, government representatives will have a choice to make: to preserve water for people and nature, or to sell it to the highest bidder. While the World Water Forum gives the impression that its aim is to solve a global water crisis, the reality is that the companies that stand to profit from human need will dominate the event. The question is, whose agenda will prevail?

ALL TALK, NO ACTION

Many people believe that the World Water Forum is the place where we will secure the right to water for all. The World Water Council, which organizes these events, has ensured that Mexico City will take on the appearance of everything an average citizen might expect from an international discussion on water. It has adopted the slogan "Local Action for a Global Challenge," and quotes all of the most recent statistics on the world water crisis.

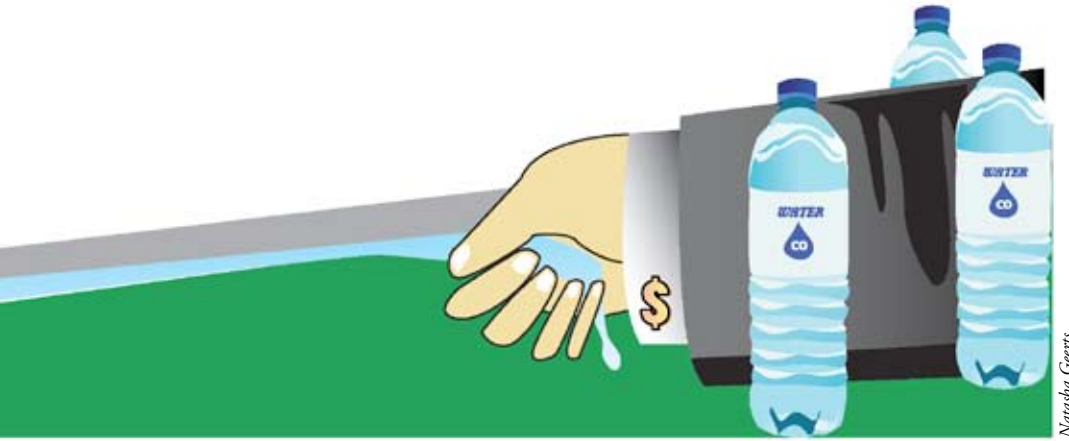
But the reality is quite different. The World Water Council is dominated by the World Bank, big water corporations, and the water ministries of First World countries. The pro-privatization lobby has a strong voice at the World Water Forum, and will continue to resist any attempts to take water out of the marketplace.

TAKE ACTION ON WORLD WATER DAY

Lobby your federal, provincial and municipal politicians to protect public water by supporting a National Water Policy that recognizes water as a human right.

Organize a film night, panel discussion or town hall meeting to bring together others in your community to discuss water issues. Create a banner, a postcard or a handbill that declares water as a human right, and explains why Canada needs a National Water Policy.

For more information on what you can do on World Water Day, check out www.blueplanetproject.net and www.canadians.org. Or call 1-800-387-7177.



The Canadian government's record is no better. At both the 2nd World Water Forum at The Hague in 2000 and the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto in 2003, Canada refused to declare water as a human right. And in 2002, Canada was the only country to vote against a resolution by the UN Committee on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur to promote the right to

water, stating, "Canada does not accept that there is a right to drinking water and sanitation."

CITIZENS' ALTERNATIVES

For months now, an international community of organizations, including the Council of Canadians' Blue Planet Project, has been meeting to coordinate

an alternative forum parallel to the one being held by the World Water Council. Activists and organizations from around the world will meet in Mexico City from March 16 to 22, to take part in a free citizens' water forum focused on promoting a global campaign for the right to water. The goal is to explore alternatives to privatization and to continue building momentum for an international treaty that guarantees the right to water.

In Canada, activists will be planning local events to put water on the agenda of the new federal government. March 22nd is World Water Day – a perfect opportunity to draw attention to a growing water crisis, and reinforce the principle that water is a human right that should remain exclusively in the public domain.

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FIVE REASONS NOT TO COMMODIFY CANADIAN WATER

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has failed to clarify his government's position on bulk water exports, and the Conservative Party platform did nothing to address growing concerns about the stability and quality of Canada's water supply.

HERE ARE FIVE REASONS WHY CANADA SHOULD TURN OFF THE TAPS ON COMMODIFICATION AND BULK WATER EXPORTS:

1 The free market doesn't guarantee access to water. Treating water as a commodity will widen the gap between the "haves" and "have nots," opening the door to the pricing of water that will unfairly impact the poor. We should not build an economic barrier to clean water.

2 Bulk exports could open the floodgates to trade challenges. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) defines water as a "service" and an "investment," leaving Canadian water vulnerable to thirsty foreign investors. Once Canada allows water to be diverted outside our borders for large-scale industrial purposes, foreign investors must be given the same "national treatment" as Canadian companies.

3 Canada's water supply is limited. The perception that Canada has an unlimited supply of water is a myth and ignores the fact that more than one quarter of municipalities have faced shortages in recent years. One third of Canadians rely on groundwater for their daily needs, but we have no understanding of how long this supply will last. Only one per cent of the water in the Great Lakes is renewable and climate change poses a major threat to the lakes, causing longer drought periods and unstable precipitation.

4 Public water is safer, cleaner and more affordable. Allowing corporate interests to control public water resources will weaken the central role of the government as the guardian of our water supply. When for-profit companies control drinking water, public health and safety are compromised.

5 Water is essential for people and nature. There is no replacement for fresh water to meet the needs of human health and livelihoods. Water cannot be treated like oil, a tradable commodity. Life is possible without oil, but we cannot live without water.

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