

June 9, 2006



The Right Honorable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

In February, nine Canadian civil society organizations came together to urge you, as the 22nd Prime Minister of Canada, to support water as a human right and to protect it, as a public trust.

At that time, many Canadian and international groups were preparing to voice their opposition to the 4th World Water Forum and organize the Alternative Forum in Defense of Water in Mexico City, which was held concurrently. The events in Mexico City culminated on World Water Day, March 22. On that day individuals and organizations across Canada participated in activities highlighting the importance of keeping water in public hands, withdrawing the resource from trade negotiations and agreements, and recognizing the right to water.

The UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights has clearly stated that water is a human right in its General Comment 15. Canada, as a signatory to the Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, is bound by this interpretation. It is time for Canada to join efforts to secure the right to water and address the urgent environmental and health issues caused by inadequate access to water and violations of fundamental human rights.

The world water justice movement is growing. Across the globe the right to water is being taken up as a rallying cry by civil society groups, individuals and their communities. Thanks to collaborative efforts of vibrant social movements, an increasing number of countries, especially in the global South, have officially stated their support for the establishment of the right to water.

At its 29th meeting held on May 19, 2006, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights considered the fourth and fifth periodic reports of Canada on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In this report, the Committee clearly criticizes Canada for not recognizing the right to water:

“The Committee regrets that the State party does not recognize the right to water as a legal entitlement, which is implicitly provided for under articles 11 and 12 of the Covenant, as outlined in the Committee’s General Comment n° 15 (2002) on the right to water” (Article 30, p.6).

It also strongly recommends that Canada review its position on the right to water:

“The Committee strongly recommends that the State party review its position on the right to water, in line with the Committee’s General Comment n° 15 (2002) on the right to water, so as to ensure equal and adequate access to water for people living in the State party, irrespective of the Province or Territory in which they live or the community to which they belong” (Article 64, p. 10).

A 2004 Ipsos-Reid poll demonstrated that 97 per cent of Canadians surveyed believe that “Canada should adopt a comprehensive national water policy that recognizes clean drinking water as a basic human right.” In addition, 183 municipal governments across Canada have passed

resolutions affirming that access to clean water is a basic human right. We are calling on you to declare your support for water as a human right and to enshrine this in a comprehensive national water policy. A national water policy must develop national clean drinking water standards, commit to infrastructure investment for municipalities and Aboriginal communities (to ensure that municipal water services are publicly owned, operated and delivered, on a not-for profit basis) and provide robust protection against the growing pressures to export water in bulk.

Today, Oscar Olivera, a leader in the Bolivian water movement joins us in requesting that you review the position of the Government of Canada on the right to water. We, the undersigned organizations, call on you Mr. Harper, and on your government, to publicly renounce the previous position taken by Canada at the United Nations and endorse the right to water.

Given Canada's record of denying the existence of the human right to water, we wish to communicate to you, Prime Minister Harper, your responsibility to uphold the public trust and respect the will of Canadians who have spoken out for the human right to water. As part of a broad coalition of national and international organizations monitoring these issues, we look forward to your response.

Sincerely, the undersigned organizations,

l'Association québécoise pour un contrat mondial de l'eau
Blue Planet Project
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
Common Frontiers
Council of Canadians
Development & Peace
Eau Secours
Friends of the Earth Canada
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
Polaris Institute
Grupo de Apoyo a los Pueblos de las Américas (GAPA)

Please direct your reply to Anil Naidoo, The Blue Planet Project:
700 – 170 Laurier Street West, Ottawa On, K1P 5V5

copied to the other party leaders in the House of Commons

Honourable Jack Layton, NDP Party Leader
House of Commons
Parliament Hill
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A9

Honourable Gilles Duceppe, BQ Party Leader
House of Commons
Parliament Hill
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A9

Honourable Bill Graham, Liberal Interim-Leader
House of Commons
Parliament Hill
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A9