

Sisters of the Holy Cross

Corporate Stand

**Water as a Human Right
and Public Trust**



Introduction

In the spring of 2003, our sisters in Brazil wrote to the Congregation Justice Office (CJC) to recommend that the Sisters of the Holy Cross consider taking a *Corporate Stand on Water as a Human Right and Public Trust*. To them it seemed a natural and important action to take as follow-up to the Congregation's endorsement of the Earth Charter in 2002. When the CJC met last summer, this recommendation received strong support and members of the Ecological Sustainability Working Group began researching the issue, articulating a rationale and drafting a proposed corporate stand statement.

In their research, working group members found that the world faces a rapidly escalating water crisis due to unsustainable consumption and inequitable distribution. One in every six people — mostly in Asia, Africa or Latin America — have no access to clean drinking water. Poor people on these continents must also pay on average 12 times more per liter of water than their wealthier neighbors to the north.

Both the U.N. *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace have affirmed that access

to water is a fundamental, inalienable human right. In response, the United Nations has made “doubling the number of people with access to clean water by 2015” a key Millennium Development Goal.

The materials developed by CJC members in support of this corporate stand are presented in the usual format for social analysis:

- ◊ reflection on experience,
- ◊ issue analysis,
- ◊ theological reflection, and
- ◊ informed action.

This booklet contains stories from our sisters around the world about water issues in countries where we minister, an analytical article on water issues reproduced from *Yes* magazine, quotations from Catholic Social Teaching on water, and the affirmation of water as a human right and public trust.

Water is a sacred gift that connects and sustains all life. Our faith calls us to revere and protect this gift and to manage it in a just and democratic manner. This corporate stand is an instrument that enables the Congregation to speak out more strongly in defense of human dignity and the rights of the entire Earth community.



Water Stories

Bangladesh

Groundwater is the major source of the water supply in Bangladesh. It is accessed by means of hand pumps and shallow tube wells. Many wells are contaminated with arsenic, especially in the southwest, middle and northeastern parts of the country. In the southwest, where I live, pumps are marked with different colors to notify the people of the high levels of arsenic in the water. In Bangladesh, 20 to 30 million people are exposed to arsenic poisoning.

Before arsenic contamination was detected, groundwater was considered a safe source of drinking water. Our groundwater is contaminated not only by arsenic, but also by the infiltration of untreated industrial and urban sewage wastes. Leaking sewers add to the groundwater pollution. Although cities provide

water to their dwellers that is supposed to be safe, poorly maintained sewage systems allow for water contamination. The overflow of sewage during rain and flooding is a regular phenomenon that also contributes to an unsafe water supply.

In South Asia, water management is a crucial issue. In our country, with one of the highest population densities in the world, we need systems to manage the floodwaters in the rainy season and the means to provide water to the people in the dry season. Climate change is producing ever-higher sea levels, making water management even more difficult for our country's people and struggling economy.

— *Sister Agnes Rozario*



Brazil

The Jequitinhonha Valley, an area scarred and impoverished by deforestation and drought, was an appropriate location for the second annual *Romaria das Aguas e Terras* (Water and Land Pilgrimage). The pilgrimage was organized by the Catholic Church's Land Pastoral Commission, nongovernmental organizations and other churches. The following is a conversation from a grassroots community meeting.

The elders in the reflection group recalled the drastic changes that decreased water in the now contaminated river had caused in the region. "Oh yes," says Senhor Jorge. "When I was a boy this region was all woods. Ten years ago ranchers raised between 1,000 and 3,000 head of cattle here. The rains from October through



Gorutuba River, Janaúba, Brazil

January prepared the land for planting good crops and fruit trees. All year long we could eat the food grown here.”

“What changed?” asked the meeting’s facilitator.

Dona Dalva said, “Lots of trees were cut down to make more grazing land for cattle — look, you can see in every direction,” she said, gesturing toward the dry fields. “Just fields and weeds are left now.”

Senhor João added, “The past few years it has rained only in January, not for three months as it always did. And now it rains for too few days to get to the deeper tree roots. It is so hard, after planting our crops, to see them dry up as they bloom because the rains don’t come soon enough to save them. What crops can stand this 104-degree heat without rain? Those who can get credit plant again with the next rain. But they often lose one or two of those crops. Then they lose their land because they can’t pay back their loan.”

“How painful and frustrating that must be,” the facilitator remarked. “Does anyone see a connection between the cutting of trees and less rain?”

”Yes!” replied Senhor João, “In my youth there were many more trees, and much more rain, too.”

The facilitator started sketching on a piece of butcher paper. “See, here are the underground rivers. See how the roots are down here near the river? Well, the water comes up through the roots and comes out through the leaves to form vapor. That, in turn, combines to form rain clouds. What conclusion can we draw from that?”

A young person spoke up. “If you cut down the trees near the streams, there are no roots to draw up the water from the underground river — and eventually, no clouds.”

“We men have observed that for some reason we could not cut trees from around springs. When that was done, they soon dried up,” said Senhor Jorge.

Senhor João’s voice broke. “I didn’t know. I work as a day laborer to make money to raise my family. I have cut down so many trees to make more grazing land for the cattle owners.”

Senhor Jorge responded: “None of us knew. We only knew that the work helped us earn money to feed our families.”

The facilitator spoke: “Some areas can be restored. It will require a conscious effort by the whole community. We need to help others see the connections and make them aware of our shared responsibility to care for the land and water. If not, this area will become a desert for everyone.

”We can encourage school children to plant seedlings and care for them. We can meet with farmers, city councilors, and union leaders to build up community consciousness and commitment for tree conservation. When you cut a tree down, you need to plant others for the good of your family and the future of the community.

“We cannot change the nature of this region, which is semi-arid. But we can re-educate ourselves to learn how to live with this reality. We can invite Senhor Rodrigo from *Caritas* to help us understand some of the techniques for conserving water. Small dams, cisterns, and holes to preserve rain water run-off can be important alternatives for us.”

Three more *romarias* have been held since then. But more education and a strong commitment will be needed to pass and enforce laws to protect land and water for future generations.

— *Sister Mary Tiernan*

Ghana

In rural areas, people depend on boreholes and streams for their water. In many places the water is polluted, and water-borne diseases are prevalent. If the streams are located near mining operations, the situation is worse. Mining companies use a lot of water for their operations, and pollute what is left with heavy concentrates of lead and other particulates.

In many of the cities, the water infrastructure is aging and needs to be replaced. This is a costly process. In places where the infrastructure is functioning, service is not dependable. When you turn the faucet on, you never know if water will be there or not. Because the service is so sporadic, people are forced to buy water from “opportunists,” which is expensive.

In Takoradi, our sisters have two water tanks and can afford to pay for city water. They have to boil the water before use, and during the dry season, seawater enters the water supply. Our neighbors are not so fortunate. If they are not able to pay for their water, their supply is disconnected. This forces them to buy bottled water, which is very expensive and its quality is not assured.

In Kasoa, there is no running water. Water is delivered by tank truck every two weeks. It is expensive and the difficulty of getting a tanker to come regularly is increasing. The sisters go to the tanks and fill their barrels (12 buckets each), and then transport it home by pickup truck. Water used for drinking has to be boiled and filtered. If they want a warm shower, they heat water and pour it over themselves with a bucket. Water also has to be hauled into their house to flush toilets.

Water systems in Ghana are gradually changing hands from local governments to private companies. Most managing companies are not Ghanaian, but European entities like Suez or Vivendi. The companies make infrastructure improvements, but then pass the costs on to the consumers, and water rates rise dramatically. The result is that water prices are too high for the people to afford, forcing them back to polluted streams for the water they need to live.

— *Sisters Esther Adjoa Entsiwah and Helene Sharp*



India

In South Asia, water is everywhere, even if you are below sea level!

What happens if you live 6,000 feet high in northeast India? I learned that it is an all-day job for one person to collect enough water for a family, to bring it home and then to boil it for drinking.

I toured a village located three hours outside the city by bus and then one more than an hour away from the mission. The family I stayed with had 11 children. The water in a nearby tin



for household use ran low early in the morning. Four women and I each picked up a five-gallon tin or a large aluminum water jug carried on the head. We started off to get water. Up and up we climbed for 30 minutes. At one point we came across two logs stretched over a deep gap in the path. The women crossed the gap with the help of the logs, but I stayed behind and waited for their return. For another half hour, the women trekked down, down until they reached a spring. They filled their containers and returned to where I was waiting for them. We rested for a while, and then went down to the dirt road that would take us back home. It took us an hour to get the water, and this trip was made five times each day.

Throughout this 100-family village, I saw upright cement slabs with a small pipe inserted

about waist length into the cement structure. I asked the catechist, "When did this go dry?" He told me, "A year ago." "Did you try to do anything about finding a new well?" I said. "Yes, the government officers came and tried to get water, but nothing came."

The next week I was in another village, and the story was the same. There I saw a young schoolgirl carrying water. She goes for water five times a day, a 40-minute round trip. If you calculate this, there is no time to study! Of course, when she brings the water home it has to be boiled, because the spring water is dirty.

Will they ever get clean accessible water? No one in the government now is interested in providing water for a village in a tribal area!

— *Sister M. Bruno (Beiro)*



Mexico

In northern Mexico, environmental awareness is at its most initial stages. Litter on the streets and in the water storage areas is all too common. In a recent Bible class on symbols, many adults could not identify the recycle symbol!

People say that the water in the Monterrey metropolitan area is safe to drink, but there is sufficient evidence (cases of typhoid) that one needs to take precautions. We purify our drinking water as well as fruits and vegetables before consuming them. We also carry purified water with us wherever we go, especially during the warm months and when we travel to less developed areas.

Water is not distributed equally. In poorer areas people may need to go out to the street to get water from a common spigot, while wealthier areas have plenty of water. Often there is public concern expressed in newspaper articles, on television and on the radio about the water level

in the reserve areas and threats of restrictions on water consumption.

We have a long way to go in the area of responsible use of water, but awareness is continuing to grow. This summer we are planning an Eco-Conscious Vacation Bible School for the 4- to 12-year-old children of our parish, hoping to make our children and families more aware of the gifts of the world around them.

— *Sister Joan Mader*



Peru

According to the National Federation of Water Workers in Peru, 6.4 million people don't have access to water service and 11.3 million don't have access to sewage systems.

In the 1990s, the government started to push reforms and structural changes related to water issues. As a consequence, the state office of water issues (SENAPA) abandoned its functions, giving them to the municipalities who now are completely responsible for the management of the service. The reforms also include changes in the water rates: There will be no more subsidies, and the government will adhere to a policy of *full cost recovery*. This policy puts the poor at a distinct disadvantage. Finally, the private sector is encouraged to get involved in the management of these basic services in those places where full cost recovery and profit are possible. The other places have remained in public hands.

For the application of these reforms, the Peruvian government spent \$200 million (\$140 borrowed from the International Development Bank). Ultimately, the reforms promoted by the World Bank and the IDB didn't have the expected results. Moreover, they created a crisis in the water sector.

At the present time, Peruvian authorities are warning that water rationing may be necessary in Lima due to lower rainfall than expected. Lima relies on rains in the Andes Mountains to fill reservoirs that serve the city and its 8 million residents. The Andean highlands that feed water to Lima appear to be entering a dry period that is expected to peak between 2005 and 2007. Thus, water in Peru will remain in short supply and costs are expected to rise.

— *Sister Mary Josephine Delany*

(Additional information is available from the Public Citizen "Water for All" web site.)



Uganda

The Ugandan Water Revenue Authority is using money previously spent on debt servicing to construct boreholes in every village. This gives people who previously walked two to three miles easier access to clean water.

The boreholes have been helpful, but problems remain. Too many people try to fetch water from one hole, and tensions are created. The places where boreholes are drilled produce dirty water. Oftentimes, people abandon the hole and search for clean water in nearby villages.

Clean water is relatively expensive. It costs 50 shillings (less than US \$0.10) for one jerry tin of water. Those who are unable to pay get their water from streams, or trap water during the rainy season and keep it. People using trapped

or stream water run the risk of contracting water-borne diseases like typhoid.

Running water is available only in towns, trading centers and institutions of learning. Users must clear their bills promptly or water officials deny access. But even the tap water is not safe enough for drinking. Bottled water is available, but expensive. One bottle of water (500 grams) previously cost US \$0.25, but the cost has doubled in the past two years.

The whole water situation in Uganda is like this: Unless more boreholes are constructed many poor people will die of diseases or simply wear out because of the long distances they go to search for water.

Nongovernmental organizations are looking into spring water and how to help people fetch water from well-constructed springs. Sister Mary DeNardis has started a spring water project in western Uganda.

— *Sister Stella Maris Kunihiro*



United States

Communities around the United States are struggling to keep their water under local public control. Municipal water systems are being privatized throughout the country, including those serving the cities of Indianapolis, Indiana; Lexington, Kentucky; and Newark, New Jersey. Citizens in these locales are organizing to regain local control of their water, but it won't be easy. In Indianapolis, the city awarded the U.S. subsidiary of Vivendi with a 20-year, \$1 billion contract.

Revelations about poor water quality and shut-offs to low-income customers are becoming all too common. In January 2004 in Washington, D.C., the public learned that the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority (WASA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) withheld information on the elevated lead levels in D.C.'s water for more than a year. In March, 3 percent of children voluntarily tested had elevated lead levels in their blood. And in Detroit, Michigan, 40,752 residences had their water service cut off between July 2001 and June 2002. Senior citizens, people with disabilities, women with young children, and ex-welfare recipients are the most common victims of the cut-offs. When cut-offs are threatened, the state emergency relief program can offer help only up to \$175. As water rates rise, the cut-offs continue.



Private industry is increasingly seeking to package large quantities of water to sell for profit. Several campaigns against the bottled water industry are beginning to emerge. In Michigan, a facility owned by Nestle Corporation has obtained a multiyear contract to pump over 500 gallons per minute from an aquifer that feeds into Lake Michigan. This water is bottled and sold under the name "Ice Mountain." The Nestle Corporation pays an annual fee of less than \$100 for this water, but reaps millions in profits from annual bottled water sales.

Finally, land over large aquifers in the West is being bought up by individuals who plan to pump and sell the water to cities, as well as to farmers that rely on the aquifers for crop irrigation. The land over the Ogallala aquifer in Texas is being bought up by millionaire oilman T. Boone Pickens, who plans to pump and sell as much as 65 billion gallons of water per year. Pumping at this rate will not allow the aquifer adequate time to replenish itself, and will lead not only to higher water rates but to dramatic drought conditions in years to come. A similar threat faces the Snake Water Plain aquifer in Idaho.

— *Sister Ann Oestreich, IHM*

(Additional information is available from the Public Citizen "Water for All" web site.)

The Battle for Water

by Tony Clarke and Maude Barlow

We are taught in school that the Earth has a closed hydrologic system; water is continually being recycled through rain and evaporation and none of it leaves the planet's atmosphere. Not only is there the same amount of water on the Earth today as there was at the creation of the planet, it's the same water. The next time you're walking in the rain, stop and think that some of the water falling on you ran through the blood of dinosaurs or swelled the tears of children who lived thousands of years ago.

While there will always be the same amount of water, we can render water unusable for ourselves and for the planet. The growing scarcity of potable water stems from a variety of causes. Per capita water consumption is doubling every 20 years, more than twice the rate of human population growth, which itself is exploding. Technology and sanitation systems, particularly those in the wealthy industrialized nations, have encouraged people to use far more water than they need. Yet even with this increase in personal water use, households and municipalities account for only 10 percent of water use.

Industry claims 20 to 25 percent of the world's fresh water supplies, and its demands are dramatically increasing. Many of the world's fastest growing industries are water intensive. For example, in the U.S. alone, the computer industry will soon use over 396 billion gallons of water each year.

Nonetheless, it is irrigation that is the real water hog, claiming 65 to 70 percent of all water used by humans. Increasing amounts of irrigation water are used for industrial farming. These water-intensive corporate farming practices are subsidized by governments and their taxpayers, and this creates a strong disincentive for farm

operations to move to conservation practices such as drip irrigation.

Along with population growth and increasing per capita water consumption, massive pollution of the world's surface water systems has placed a great strain on remaining supplies of clean fresh water. Global deforestation, destruction of wetlands, dumping of pesticides and fertilizer into waterways, and global warming are all taking a terrible toll on the Earth's fragile water systems.

The world is running out of fresh water. By the year 2025, there will be 2.6 billion more people on Earth than there are today. As many as two-thirds of those people will be living in conditions of serious water shortage, and one-third will be living with absolute water scarcity. Demand for water will exceed availability by 56 percent.

Water as a commodity

The combination of increasing demand and shrinking supply has attracted the interest of global corporations who want to sell water for a profit. The water industry is touted by the World Bank as a potential trillion-dollar industry. Water has become the "blue gold" of the 21st century.

The move to privatize water coincides with the rise of the Washington Consensus as the dominant world economic philosophy. This philosophy calls for trade and investment liberalization, and turning responsibility for social programs and resource management over to the private sector. In this case, it is an assault on the ancient commons of water.

Global trade agreements have become perhaps the most important tool for corporations trading in water and their allies. All of the multinational governing bodies, the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA), the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), define water as a commodity. As a result, water is now subject to the same rules and regulations governing other commodities like oil and natural gas. Under these combined international rules, a country cannot prohibit or limit the export of water without risking censure by the WTO. Nations are also restricted from denying the import of water from any country. NAFTA's "proportionality clause" means that if a country turns on the tap to export its natural resources, it cannot turn off the tap until it runs out of that resource.

In addition, the push to privatize water services will be greatly enhanced by new rules governing cross-border trade in services at the WTO, known as the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services). Under the proposed GATS rules, not only will governments face added pressures to deregulate and privatize their water systems, but once a city's water services have been taken over by a foreign-based corporation, efforts to take these services back into public hands will invite severe economic penalties under the WTO.

Leading the charge for privatization are three big transnational corporations based in Europe: Vivendi, Suez, and RWE. All three have systematically bought out smaller rivals to become the dominant powers in the business of water all over the globe. The long-range strategy of these companies began with their efforts to take over the public water systems in Third World countries where they hoped to position themselves as the saviors of the water crisis. Instead, a series of private-sector fiascoes in the Third World derailed their plans.

The case of Buenos Aires is especially instructive. Buenos Aires was to be the flagship operation of Third-World water privatization. Suez, through its subsidiary Aguas Argentinas, took over the Buenos Aires water and sewage system in 1992. A common argument for privatizing water systems is

that, unlike the cash-strapped public sector, the private sector has the capital necessary to update or refurbish aging water systems. But public sources like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other smaller banks supplied 97 percent of the \$1 billion necessary for the Suez privatization experiment. Suez did expand water and sewage service by a small increment, but failed to meet its projected targets in both areas. Nonetheless, the company managed to reap annual profits of around 25 percent in the mid-1990s. Recently, Suez announced that it plans to pull out of Argentina because the country's currency crisis has cut into its profits. There have been other private-sector fiascoes in places like Johannesburg, New Delhi, Manila, and most famously in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

The effort to privatize Third World water systems has become a target of civil society protests. Representatives of an international civil society network appeared at a meeting of chief executive officers at the World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan, in March. The group took over the microphones and offered a series of testimonials about the impact of water privatization around the world. Toward the end of the event, a water activist from Cancun, Mexico, stepped to the microphone and held up a glass of pitch-black, putrid-smelling water. He explained that he had taken the water from his home tap in Cancun, where Suez runs the municipal water system. He then requested that the moderator pass the glass of black, smelly water up on stage to the CEO of Suez, inviting him to drink it.

Targeting First World water

The big water companies are now changing their strategy and concentrating their operations and their investment on more secure markets in North America and Europe. Eighty-five percent of all water services in the U.S. are still in public hands. That's a tempting target for conglomerates like Suez, Vivendi, and RWE. Within the next 10 years, they aim to control 70 percent of water services across the United States.

They have positioned themselves to move aggressively. Vivendi, Suez, and RWE have bought up the leading U.S. water companies, U.S. Filter, United Water, and American Water Works, respectively. These water companies had largely serviced small towns and communities, but under the tutelage of the global giants they have become the engines for privatization in the United States .

When transnational water conglomerates take over a municipal water system, it feels like a local problem, but because the same corporate players are targeting communities all over the world, we must build alliances and connections, learn from one another, and start to build a frontal attack.

At the Polaris Institute, we propose a three-pronged strategy. First, develop a water-alert network so we can know where companies are operating and where they are going next. How are they going to move? And how can we get ahead of them?

Second, we need water-action teams that bring citizens together to build local water-watch coalitions and develop campaigns to protect their water supplies and services from conglomerates. Then we should link those local campaigns with the national campaigns of groups like Public Citizen or the Council of Canadians.

Third, we need to offer alternatives. It is not enough to say we want to defend our public water systems against private takeovers. There are problems with public water systems, and we must find new ways of revitalizing them in our own communities through citizen participation. Engaged citizens can act as watchdogs for their local water systems.

Our local actions should be informed by three global principles. One is water conservation. We cannot kid ourselves about water scarcity. Water may be abundant in one place, but it's scarce in others. Water conservation must be a top priority.

The second principle is that water is a fundamental human right. People need water to live. Water must be provided equitably to all people and not on the basis of the ability to pay.

The third principle is water democracy. We cannot leave the management of our most precious resource in the hands of bureaucrats in government or the private corporations, whether or not they are well intentioned. We, the people, must preserve this special trust, we must fight for it, and we must take our proper role and demand water democracy.



Maude Barlow, national chair of the Council of Canadians, and Tony Clarke, director of the Polaris Institute, are co-authors of *Blue Gold: The Corporate Theft of the World's Water*. Reprinted with permission from YES! magazine, P.O. Box 10818, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110. Subscriptions: (800) 937-4451. Web: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/28water/barlow.htm>.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. An important principle of Catholic Social Teaching is reverence and respect for creation. The goods of the earth are gifts from God, intended for the benefit of all. Are the values of reverence, respect and gratitude consistent with the privatization and commodification of water?
2. What values do you think should be central to managing the planet's water resources?

Catholic Social Teaching on Water

Excerpts from the Message of John Paul II for Brazil's "2004 Fraternity Campaign" – *Water, Source of Life*

“As everyone knows, water is immensely important for the earth: without this precious element, it would rapidly become an arid desert, a place of hunger and thirst where people, animals and plants would be condemned to death. In addition to being a condition for life on earth, water also has the power to cleanse and purify. . . .

“As a gift from God, water is a vital element essential to survival; thus, everyone has a right to it. Attention must be paid to the problems that derive from its scarcity, which is evident not only in Brazil but also in many parts of the world. Water is not an unlimited resource. Its rational use in solidarity demands the collaboration of all people of good will with the Government Institutions so as to ensure the effective protection of the environment. . . .”



Remarks of Auxiliary Bishop Odilo Pedro Scherer of São Paulo, Brazil, regarding this year's Fraternity Campaign

“. . . Water resources in Brazil run the risk of being contaminated even in areas where one would say this is impossible, as in Amazonia, where on many occasions chemical products have contaminated immense rivers. . . .

“Moreover, we are concerned by the privatization of water, as in many parts of Brazil and the world, water obeys the laws of the market. . . .

“We believe that water not only is a consumer good, but a good to which all human beings have a right, even if they don't have money.”

Excerpt from *Water, An Essential Element for Life* – Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, March 14, 2003

“There is a growing movement to formally adopt a human right to water. The dignity of the human person mandates its acknowledgement, along with the sound and logical argumentation found in the concept of implicit inclusion. Water is an essential commodity for life. Without water, life is threatened, with the result being death. The right to water is thus an inalienable right.”

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What actions can we take, as Sisters of the Holy Cross, to better appreciate and protect our freshwater resources?
2. The Vatican has spoken out on the need to protect and better manage our water resources. The Brazilian bishops have made water a special focus of reflection and action in their country. Many bishops throughout the world have written pastoral letters expressing concern for water resources. Is it important for us, as a congregation, to speak out on the present water crisis?

Corporate Stand

Water as a Human Right and Public Trust

RATIONALE

Because we know that

- ◊ Access to clean water in sufficient amounts is absolutely essential for human life and health.
- ◊ Freshwater is a limited resource: only 2.5 percent of Earth's total water supply is freshwater and less than 1 percent of that is usable in a renewable fashion.
- ◊ The world's finite supply of accessible freshwater is so polluted, diverted and depleted that millions of people and other species are deprived of water for life.
- ◊ Lack of access to adequate freshwater increases the likelihood of violent conflict between nations.
- ◊ Commodification of freshwater and privatization of water services typically decrease accessibility of clean, affordable water for poor persons and countries.
- ◊ Water is explicitly recognized as a human right in the *General Comment on the Right to Water* adopted by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in November 2002.
- ◊ John Paul II and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace assert that access to safe water is an inalienable human right.



Because we believe that

- ◊ Water is a sacred gift: the lifeblood of Earth and rightful inheritance of Earth and all species.
- ◊ Water is a public good and all sectors of society should be involved in decision-making regarding its protection, management and distribution.
- ◊ Catholic Social Teaching and our commitment to the Earth Charter call us to take personal and collective responsibility for safeguarding the world's freshwater and ensuring its equitable distribution.

We endorse the following Corporate Stand.

Corporate Stand Statement

The Sisters of the Holy Cross affirm that:

1. Access to clean water is a fundamental, inalienable human right.
2. Earth's freshwater is
 - 💧 a shared legacy;
 - 💧 a common good;
 - 💧 a public trust; and
 - 💧 a collective responsibility.
3. As an essential element of life, freshwater must not be treated as a private commodity to be bought, sold and traded for profit.

Therefore, we support actions and policies that

1. ensure access to sufficient, affordable, safe water for all people, especially the most vulnerable; and
2. protect freshwater as a sustainable, renewable resource.

We oppose actions and policies that

1. endanger the world's supply of freshwater;
2. deprive humans and other species access to adequate, safe water essential for life; and
3. commodify and privatize the global water commons.



Further Reading and Study on Water Issues

Analysis/Information

“Longing for Running Streams” by Mary Turgi, CSC. *Perspectives* (newsletter of the Holy Cross International Justice Office), winter 2003, pp. 1,8-9,12. (www.holycrossjustice.org)

“Water: A basic need and a human right” by Roberta Bennett, CSC. *Life Signs*, March/April 2004. (www.cscsisters.org/publications)

“Untapped Connections: Gender, Water and Poverty.” Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), 355 Lexington Avenue, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10017-6603. January 2003. Available on-line in English, Spanish and Portuguese. (<http://www.wedo.org/programs/sustainable.htm>)

“Diverting the Flow: A Resource Guide to Gender, Rights and Water Privatization.” Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), 355 Lexington Avenue, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10017-6603. November 2003. (<http://www.wedo.org/programs/sustainable.htm>)

The World’s Water 2002–2003: The Biennial Report on Freshwater Resource. Peter Gleick, et.al., Island Press, Washington, D.C. 2002.

Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit. Vandana Shiva, South End Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2002.

Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World’s Water. Maude Barlow and Tony Clark, The New Press, New York, New York. 2002.

Prayer/Reflection

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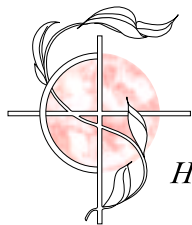
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Congregation Justice Committee



Sisters of the Holy Cross

পবিত্র ক্রুশ ভগিনীগণ

Irmãs da Santa Cruz

Hermanas de la Santa Cruz

June 2004