



Presentation Society Justice Newsletter



Issue No. 3

Dear Sisters and Associates

The International Year for FreshWater has been the focus in the previous two editions of the newsletter for 2003. Our May issue provides more background on the right of all people to clean water for drinking and sanitation. This and other water related questions are presented in a summary of the article by Professor Riccardo Petrella in which he reminds his audience that the 'rights' struggles of the past (the vote for women, right to work, to religious freedom, etc.) have never been easy and concludes that the struggle for access to water for humankind will follow a similar pattern.

From a local perspective, we provide background on Australia's commitment to ensuring all people have access to safe water for drinking and sanitation. We invite you to be part of a national campaign organised by *Water Matters Australia* to urge the Australian Government to meet its obligations to be part of the solution in halving the proportion of people without access to safe water and sanitation by 2015.

We also have another action that we urge you to take on behalf of the people of West Papua.

Joan Power and Kathleen Tynan

ACCESS TO SAFE WATER - A RIGHT FOR ALL

The following is a summary of an article written by Riccardo Petrella, Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) and Secretary General of the International Committee for World Contract on Water:

Three themes dominate the discussion around the individual and collective choices to be made regarding water:

1. Who owns water, a principal source of life?
2. Is access to water a right or a need?
3. Is it true that there is an increased scarcity of fresh water?

Each question suggests other related ones, the answers to which have enormous consequences at local, national and world levels and can effect the advancement of society towards the cause of justice, human rights, fraternity, liberty, equality and participatory democracy.

In answering these questions from the perspective of justice and solidarity, Petrella raises issues which must lead to significant changes at all levels of civil society whose arguments are often governed by economic and political values.

Answer One: Water is a common good that belongs to all living beings in general and to humankind in particular. Consequently it behooves us to ensure a collective management in its use, conservation and protection, respecting the right to life of each and every human person, other living creatures as well as future generations.

In the west no national constitution or international treaty considers water as a common good belonging to all humankind. It is seen as a good to be used as a resource – an economic and commercial good based on market supremacy. The result is private ownership and use.

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***Need cries
loudly
from the
winding lanes***

Today 1.1 billion people lack access to clean water. This means that across the world 1 in every 6 people have no direct access to clean water and 40% have to live without adequate sanitation facilities.

Links with IPA

We acknowledge Annette Shears' contribution to the committee. Annette, our IPA Networker, attends and participates in all the SJC meetings.

A market principle is that goods are replaceable which provides the rationale for the function of relative prices.

But, unlike other resources, water is irreplaceable – it cannot be substituted. It is not a good that subjects itself to choice. Everyone needs water. Hence it cannot be subjected to the principles of sectoral and partial regulation, rationalization and market assessment. No matter the source from which it is drawn e.g. desalinated water, it will always remain a common and fundamental good belonging to the whole of humanity.

Answer Two: Access to water is a human and social right, individual and collective, universal and indisputable.

Water cannot be reduced to a need appealing to the market for its gratification. It is a universal and indisputable human right.

It is unacceptable that some 1.5 billion human beings do not have access to drinking water when production practices, especially agriculture, destroy and deteriorate water resources. If water “revolution” does not take place, around 5 billion persons will live in regions with serious access to water problems.

The costs involved in providing water for all is a fundamental responsibility of society. The issue of choice in regard to water is only about the modality of access to and use of water: surface *or* underground water; restricted ownership *or* sharing water; water for agriculture *or* domestic needs; tap or bottled water.

The costs to ensure access, use, conservation and protection of water are multiple and of a different nature, interaction and interdependent, and are not replaceable. An integral and sustainable management of water draws its efficiency from the global, integral and cumulative assumption of costs.

Answer Three: Refute the ‘petrolisation’ of water

Poverty in the South and the non-sustainability model of the North give rise to the scarcity of water and are the principle causes of a possible ‘world crisis in water’ predicted around 2015-20. However, if so called rich and developed countries develop a goal of total elimination of poverty in the world within the next generation, then the crisis of water would be evaded. Sadly, world conferences (Monterey and World Summit of the FAO) abandoned such a goal

because of the consequences for the capitalist economies which govern the world market.

It is argued that ‘wars for water’ could become a greater feature of the future. In reality, water is but one of many reasons for conflicts - ethnic rivalry, racism, xenophobia, historical, political and economic being others.

Water alone is not the primary cause of conflicts, rather it can be a means to put an end to them. The solution to conflict lies in the political will of the ruling class of people ‘at war’ to put an end to disputes through a mutual recognition of the right to life and to development.

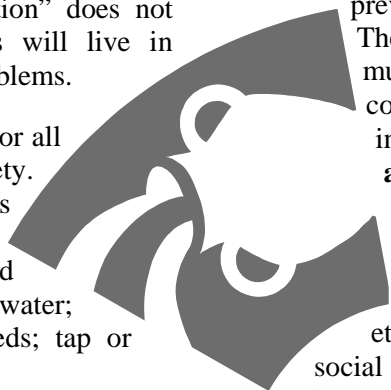
Petrella reminds his audience that the ‘rights’ struggles of the past (the vote for women, right to work, to religious freedom etc.) have never been easy and concludes that the struggle for access to water for all humankind will follow a similar pattern.

Petrella poses three possible scenarios for the next 15 to 20 years. Firstly, if no change or no significant change prevails, the outcome would be **intolerable**. The second, where interventions of bilateral or multilateral funding is made by the North, and countries adopt crisis measures, would result in a scenario of **compassion and a rationalised sense of humanity**.

The third possible course of action could include: movements in civil society (including world religions) persuading the ethically and socially guided economic and social forces of the rich countries undertaking substantial changes to agricultural and industrial politics, to the regulations of international commerce, to financial mechanisms, to the modality of urban development; the curbing of liberalisation and privatisation; new forms of participative public administration based on ‘local’ values; sustainable management models replicated in North and South; the number of great dams reduced; the art of common water management learned by local communities; technological innovations respect agriculture and water for all; a World Authority for Water established around 2006/7; an international fiscal system for water provision for all established by 2008.

Such action would create a society founded on justice and solidarity.

To move towards the third scenario some necessary transformations are required:



- Substantial reform of agricultural politics to support the development of agriculture that provides food locally;
- The abandonment of the binomial–productivity–consumerism;
- Return to the municipality system of water stewardship and management;
- A financial system at the service of all through fiscal redistribution;
- Creation of water parliaments at the level of water basins;
- Exclusion of water services from negotiations of GATS/WTO;
- Creation of a World Water Parliament;
- Awareness-raising campaigns in schools;
- Support to media which works for human rights and the common good.



LOCAL RESPONSE TO A GLOBAL JUSTICE ISSUE—AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENT TO ENSURING PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO SAFE WATER FOR DRINKING AND SANITATION

Background

The Millennium Development Goals include ensuring people have access to safe water for drinking and sanitation.

In September 2000 at the UN Millennium Summit world leaders agreed to a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. They include pledges to halve the proportion of people without access to safe water and sanitation by 2015. In developed countries such as Australia the campaign's primary focus is on galvanising public opinion as a means to boost development assistance.

Australia signed up to the 2015 water target at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 and the sanitation target at the Johannesburg Earth Summit in late 2002. Therefore, Australia is formally committed to achieving these targets. In March this year Alexander Downer presented to parliament the most recent AusAID report, "Making Every Drop Count". In this report the government made a commitment that water and sanitation provision would be a "priority focus" for Australia's aid program. The report describes two water and

sanitation projects (one in India and one in Vietnam) and two expertise-sharing programs (the Australian Water Research Facility and the Water and Coastal Resource Management Partnership). The degree to which these represent new funding or are merely a re-badging of old funding is at yet unclear.

At present levels of spending, Australia falls far short of our commitment to the 2015 water and sanitation target. The best estimates based on official OECD figures (DAC, 2002) are that Australia spends no more than A\$60 million per year on water and sanitation development. To meet its obligations to the targets Australia will need to increase funding each year towards A\$355 million by the 2007-2008 budget. This will require a bare minimum of \$100 million of water and sanitation aid in next budget.

*If I could
be of service
in any part
of the world
I would
gladly
do all
in my
power*

Nano Nagle

As well as writing a letter, please consider visiting your local MP. Your efforts are vital to making sure the Australian Government takes action. Only a few MPs will have detailed knowledge of water and sanitation development, so it is important to let them know the basics. Without public pressure the issue can easily be overlooked.

Action We Can Take:

Write a letter to your local Federal MP (see page 4)

Keeping in Touch with West Papua Issues

Information available about the situation in West Papua continues to be alarming. The safety of human rights activists is constantly threatened and the number of West Papuan refugees in the western provinces of Papua New Guinea, so close to our Sisters in Aitape, is estimated to be around fifteen thousand men, women and children.

In the light of what happened in East Timor and with the hope that we can learn from past experience, it is important that the Australian Government engages with Indonesia over the issue of West Papua and the violation of human rights occurring there.

Secondly, the Australian Government can be urged to encourage the Indonesian government to enter into a dialogue with the civil society organisations, including Church groups, who are trying to create a Zone of Peace in the province.

With respect to the small number of the approximate 15,000 West Papuan refugees in PNG who wish to resettle in a third country, it is recommended that the Australian Government includes places for West Papuans in its resettlement programs.

ACTION: Write to the Honourable Alexander Downer MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600, urging that these matters be addressed.

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SAMPLE LETTER:

Here are some relevant facts to help you write your letter. Please address some of these points in your letter. [Note: We have been told that handwritten letters are generally taken more seriously because they imply a citizen feels strongly enough to take the time to write.]

Introduction

"I am writing because..."

Things you might like to include in your introduction:

- 1.1 billion people lack access to safe water out of a total world population of 6 billion
- 2.4 billion lack access to adequate sanitation
- water-related diseases are the biggest cause of death in the world today
- 6,000 children die each day from water-borne diseases
- 90% of water waste in developing countries goes untreated into local rivers and streams
- Asia has the most people deprived of water (65% of world total) and sanitation (80% of world total)
- Africa has the most acute water crisis per capita
- This year is the International Year of Freshwater.

Part 1: Funding

"Australia should pay its fair share..."

Things you might like to say on the issue of funding:

- Australia has committed to the 2015 target to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water (signed at the 2000 Millennium Summit)
- Australia has committed to the 2015 target to halve the proportion of people without access to adequate sanitation (signed at the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit)
- Australia currently spends no more than A\$60 million on water and sanitation in developing countries (estimate based on OECD DAC figures,

2002)

- Australia is not yet meeting its fair share of the funding required to meet the 2015 targets. Meeting these will cost A\$355 million in 2007-2008. A bare minimum of A\$100 million is required to ensure the Australian Government is on track.
- The most recent AusAID report, "Making Every Drop Count", committed no new funds to water and sanitation development.

Part 2: Effectiveness of Aid

"Australia's aid money should be spent correctly..."

Things you might like to say about the effectiveness of Australian aid:

- Globally, 7% of all aid goes to water and sanitation development (OECD, 2002)
- Australia spends 3.5% of its aid on water and sanitation development (OECD, 2002)
- The use of appropriate technology ensures development most effectively benefits the poor
- Appropriate technology is developed through partnership with local communities who best know their needs
- Australia is sharing its water management knowledge through the Australian Water Research Facility and the Water and Coastal Resource Management Partnership.

Conclusion

"To finish with..."

- Thank them for taking time to listen to your concerns
- Tell them to let you know what action they are taking
- Ask them to respond to the specifics of what you have said
- Let them know that you are looking forward to their response.

Yours sincerely
(Name and address)

Source of this material: Water Matters Website
<http://www.watmattersaustralia.org>