

THE WATER MANIFESTO

The right to life

We come from Africa, Latin America, North America, Asia and Europe. We gathered together in 1998¹ with no other legitimacy or representativeness than that of being citizens concerned by the fact that 1.4 billion of the planet's 5.8 billion inhabitants do not have access to drinking water, the fundamental source of life. This fact is intolerable. Now, the risk is great that in the year 2020 when the world population reaches around 8 billion human beings, the number of people without access to drinking water will increase to more than 3 billion. This is unacceptable. We can and must prevent the unacceptable becoming possible. How?

We think that we can do this by applying the principles and rules outlined below.

Principles

1

**Water « the source of life »
belongs to all the inhabitants
of the Earth in common**

As the fundamental and irreplaceable « source of life » for the eco-system, water is a vital good, which belongs to all the inhabitants of the Earth in common. None of them, individually or as a group, can be allowed the right to make it private property. **Water is the patrimony of mankind.** Individual and collective health depends upon it. Agriculture, industry and domestic life are intimately linked to it. Its « unsubstituable » character means that the whole human community – and each of its members – must have the right of access to water, and in particular, drinking

¹ In Lisbon, Valencia (Spain) and Lisbon again on the initiative of the Group of Lisbon and the Mario Soares Foundation, thanks to the financial support from the C. Gulbenkian Foundation, the Instituto da Agua, the Grupo IPE-Aguas do Portugal

water, in the necessary quantity and quality indispensable to life and economic activity. There is no production of wealth without access to water. Water is not like any other resource: it is not an exchangeable, marketable commodity.

2

**The right to water is an
inalienable individual and
collective right**

Water belongs more to the economy of common goods and wealth sharing than to the economy of private and individual accumulation and other's wealth expropriation. While the sharing of water has often been a major source of social inequality in the past, today's civilisations recognise that access to water is a fundamental, inalienable individual and collective right. **The right to water is a part of the basic ethics of a « good » society and a « good » economy.** It is up to society as a whole and at the different levels of social organisation to guarantee the right of access, according to the double principle of co-responsibility and subsidiarity, without discrimination of race, sex, religion, income or social class.

3

**Water has to contribute to
the strengthening of
solidarity among people,
communities, countries,
genders, generations**

Fresh water resources are unequally distributed on the Earth. Income also. This does not mean that there also must be **inequality of access to water between people and communities and regions.** Moreover, the inequality in the distribution of water and financial wealth does not mean that the people rich in water

and rich in revenue can make use of it as they please, indeed sell it (or buy it) « abroad » to derive the maximum profit (or pleasure). In many regions of the world water remains a source of inequalities **between men and women** the latter bearing all the burden of homework dependent on water. These inequalities must be removed. There are still **too many water-related wars** ongoing on our Planet because most States continue to use water as an instrument in support of their geo-economic strategic interests as regions' « hegemonic » power. It is necessary and possible to make water free from the influence of a hegemony-oriented State. Water is a « res publica ».

4

**Water is the citizens'
business**

Creating the conditions necessary to ensure the most effective and sustainable access to water is everybody's concern.. It is also an inter-generational issue so that it is up to present generations to use, valorise, protect and conserve water resources in such a way that future generations can enjoy the same freedom of action and choice that we wish for ourselves today. **The citizen must be at the centre of decision-making**. The integrated and sustainable management of water belongs to the sphere of democracy. It goes beyond the skills and to the know-how of technicians, engineers and bankers. The users have a key role to play by their choices and practices to ensure environmental, economic and societal sustainability.

5

**Water policy implies a high
degree of democracy at the local,
national, continental and world
level**

By definition, water calls for decentralised management and transparency. The existing institutions of representative democracy must be strengthened. When necessary, new forms of democratic government have to be created. **Participatory democracy is unavoidable.** This is possible, with or without the new information and communication technologies, at the level of local communities, cities, basins, regions. New coherent **regulatory frameworks at international and global level** must be designed and implemented, enhancing the visibility of a sustainable water policy at global level by the global community. **Parliaments** are the natural loci and players in this respect. This is why we also believe that it is urgent and essential to (re)valorise **local and traditional water harvesting practices.** An important heritage of knowledge, skills and community based practices, highly efficient and sustainable, has been dilapidated and run down. It runs the risk of being destroyed still further in the years to come.

6

Access to water necessarily takes place through partnership. It is time to go beyond the logic of “warlords” and economic conflicts for the domination and conquest of markets

Citizenship and democracy are founded on co-operation and mutual respect. They exist by and through partnership. “Partnerships for water” is the inspiring principle behind all the plans (such as “the river agreements”) that have permitted the efficient resolution of conflicts which in certain regions of the world have traditionally poisoned relationships between riverside communities who shared the same hydrographic basin. Indeed, we support a real local/national/world and real public/private partnership. A sustainable water management in the general interest cannot but be founded on the respect for cultural diversity and socio-economic

pluralism. A partnership predominantly subject, as at present, to the logic and interests of private actors in relentless competition against each other for market conquest could only do harm to the objectives of access to water for all and global integrated sustainability.

7

We believe that the financial responsibility for water must be at once collective and individual according to the principles of responsibility and utility

Ensuring access to water for the vital and fundamental needs of every person and every human community is an obligation for society as a whole. It is society which must collectively assume all of the costs related to the collection, production, storage, distribution, use, conservation and recycling of water in view of supplying and guaranteeing access to water in the quantities and qualities considered as being the indispensable minimum. The costs (including the negative externalities which are not taken into account by market prices) are common social costs to be borne by the collective as a whole. This principle is even more relevant and significant at the level of a country, a continent and the world society. The financing must be ensured by collective redistribution. The mechanisms of individual price-fixing, according to progressive pricing must start from a level of water usage that goes beyond the vital and indispensable minimum. Beyond the vital minimum, progressive pricing must be a function of the quantity used. Finally, at a third layer, all abuses and excesses of usage must be considered illegal.

Proposals

In order that the rules become a living reality in the course of the next 20 to 25 years, when two billion human beings will be added to the present population, we

propose that the following measures be taken and implemented in a kind of “World Water Contract” alongside two main axes :

- the creation of a ‘Network of Parliaments for Water”
- the promotion of information campaign, awareness raising and mobilisation on “Water for All”.

We also propose the establishment of a World Observatory for Water Rights.

The Creation of a Network of Parliaments for Water

It is in Parliaments, the principal organs of political representation in “westernised” societies, and in comparable institutions, in other civilisational contexts, that the responsibility falls, to modify the existing legislation by applying the principles and rules outlined above. Defining a new legal framework at local and national levels but also at the international and world level is a major task for Parliaments to fill up the void that exists in this domain at the world level. The priority is to establish “**World Water Treaty**” legalising water as a vital patrimonial good, common to all humanity. This “treaty”, for example, should exclude water from all international commercial conventions (such as those existing within the framework of the World Trade Organisation), as is already the case for the cultural domain.

Promotion of information campaigns, awareness-raising and mobilisation concerning

1. The development (or modernisation) of the systems of **water distribution and sanitation for the 600 cities** in Russia, African, Asian, Latin American and European countries which will have more than a million inhabitants by the year 2020 and whose water system is even today obsolete, inadequate, indeed, non-existent
2. **The fight against new sources of water pollution in the cities** of North America, Western Europe and Japan where contamination of the soil and both surface and deep ground water, is becoming more and more troubling, serious and in certain cases, irreversible.

These actions would respond to the objective of “**3 billion taps” by 2020**.

NGO's, trade unions and scientists have in this respect an essential and determining role to play.

To these purposes, **priority should be given to**

- **The structural reform of irrigation systems in highly intensive industrial agriculture**

The solutions exist already such as, for example, “drip irrigation”.

Existing “modern” agriculture is the principal consumer of the planet's freshwater resources (accounting for 70% of total world extraction, of which the largest part is for irrigation). Yet, 40% of irrigation water is lost *en route* from source to sink). Furthermore, industrial agriculture is source of major damages and threats to the environment (soil salinity and hydromorphism in particular)

- **A 10 to 15 year-moratorium in the construction of new large dams** which have so far created considerable short- and long-term problems for the environment, local populations and the possibility of integrated, sustainable water management.

The establishment of a World Observatory for Water Rights.

The main goal of this observatory will be to collect, produce, distribute and disseminate the most rigorous and reliable information possible on water access from the point of view of individual and collective rights, water production, its use, its conservation/ protection and democratic sustainable development. The Observatory must become one of the world reference points for information on water rights, in support of the most effective forms of water partnership and solidarity.

Members of the Committee for the World Water Contract

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- Mario **Albornoz**, Professor at the University of Quilmes, Argentina
- Raoul **Alfonsin**, former President of the Republic of Argentina
- Driss **Ben Sari**, Professor at Rabat University, Morocco
- Rafaeil **Blasco Castany**, Presidencia de la Generalitat Valenciana
- Rinaldo **Bontempi**, Member of the European Parliament, Italy
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For further information and interest to sustain the Water Manifesto and its proposals, please contact ***The Global Water Contract. A Citizen Initiative.***

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