

A Civil Society Call to the Ministerial Conference at the Third World Water Forum, Kyoto, Japan

KEEP WATER AND WATER SERVICES OUT OF THE WTO

We call upon all governments to resolve to keep water and water services out of the WTO and all other regional and international trade and investment negotiations and agreements.

Global water crisis will worsen—especially in the developing world—if water is subjected to WTO rules that put corporate interests ahead of the right to water as fundamental to life. Once countries adopt commitments to liberalise in a specific sector, they are all but impossible to reverse.

Background

Civil society representatives gathered at the Bonn International Freshwater Conference (December 2001) stated that access to adequate safe water is a fundamental human right and that the governments have an obligation to ensure this right. Those of us present there had expressed our concern and opposition to the increasingly narrow focus on the economic value of water, at the expense of the social, cultural, spiritual and ecological values when it comes to policy formulation and practice. We reaffirm that the integrity of the hydrological cycle must be maintained for the common good of our societies and ecosystems.

In the context of the above statements, and in view of the Rio Principle 18.8 as well as the General Comment on 'The right to water' (GC No. 15, 2002) of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, we want to draw your attention to the dangerous developments at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar and after.

- The European Union along with a few other developed countries **have proposed that water be included as an environmental service** under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

The consequences of this decision would be significant. At their meeting in Doha, WTO ministers agreed to "the reduction or as appropriate, elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to environmental goods and services." They also agreed to deadlines for bilateral negotiations to expand GATS through requests and offers. One of these **deadlines is March 31, 2003**, when all WTO members are to make initial offers to open new sectors in their countries to trans-national provision of services (in response to the initial requests from other member countries).

- A recent release of the **leaked European Commission requests on GATS show that 109 countries**—including least developed countries—are being asked **to open up their service sectors ranging from water supplies to financing.**

Water in developing countries is a major target for European water companies in the current negotiations. Many of them are lobbying their governments and international financial and trade institutions to facilitate risk free investments. In pursuing a corporate-driven agenda towards developing countries, the European Commission seems to have forgotten the golden rule of doing as you would be done by: according to the EU's initial draft GATS offer, the EU itself is (with good reason!) not intending to liberalize drinking water services under the GATS.

One of the arguments used to deflect criticisms of GATS is that developing countries have the choice to "opt in" the services they want to be liberalised, making exemptions for those they wish to build up domestically. While that may be true, what the document shows is that the commission has simply taken this list of exemptions and has used it to base its liberalisation hit list especially in the case of developing countries.

An additional aspect of the negotiations that is perhaps even more of a threat is the development of new GATS restrictions on regulations over services to limit them to what is the "least burdensome" to business. All licensing requirements for water utilities, standards for water quality, and qualifications of water utility staff would become vulnerable to a WTO challenge if these rules were considered "more burdensome than necessary."

These developments pose an **immediate threat** to the world's declining freshwater resources, the health of all people and ecosystems and to national sovereignty over water, **especially as a service but also as a good**, as experience in many parts of the world shows. The GATS process is a one-way street towards increased limitations on environmentally and socially responsible policies.

It is in this context that we call upon the Ministerial Conference to declare that 'water and water services should be kept out of the WTO and all other bilateral and multilateral trade and investment negotiations and agreements'.

SIGNATORIES AS OF MAY 1, 2003

l'ACME, (Association pour un Contrat Mondial de l'Eau), France
A SEED Europe, The Netherlands
A SEED Japan
Ação Brasileira Pela Nutrição e Direitos Humanos (ABRANDH), Brazil
Accion Ecologica, Ecuador
ActionAid, Asia Regional Office
Adrian Dominican Sisters, USA
Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network, UK
Afrika 21st Century Organization, Kenya
Alliance for Democracy, USA
Alotau Environment Ltd, Papua New Guinea
Anarchist Action of Rochester, USA
AP Coalition in Defence of Diversity, Hyderabad, India
Asian Human Rights Commission, Hong Kong
L'Association pour le Contrat Mondial de l'Eau, Canada
Association Aruana, France
Atascadero-Green Valley Creek Watershed Council, USA
ATTAC, Japan
Australian Greens, Australia
Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' League Qld Inc., Australia
Berne Declaration, Switzerland
Both ENDS, The Netherlands
Campaign for Pesticide Reduction, Canada
Campaign for Responsible Transplantation, USA
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Canada
Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health (CPATH), USA
Center of Concern, USA
Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano (Ceccam), Mexico
Centro Internazionale Crocevia, Italy
Cesar Villavicencio Atienza de la Alianza Humanista Juvenil, Peru
CESDI (Center for Environment and Sustainable Development India), India
Church Women United of NYS, USA
CLEAN (Citizens of Lee Environmental Action Network), USA
The Clinch Coalition, USA
Coalition for Jobs and the Environment, USA
COECCOIBA-Friends of the Earth Costa Rica
COICA, Ecuador
Common Fire Foundation, USA
Community Nutrition Institute, USA
Community Information Association, Australia
The Conservation Council of New Brunswick, Canada
Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida, Bolivia
Cordillera Peoples Alliance, Philippines
CORE Centre for Organisation Research & Education, India
The Corner House, UK
Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), Netherlands
The Council of Canadians' Blue Planet Project, Canada
Deccan Development Society, India
Derechos Humanos, Venezuela
Development Visions, Pakistan
Devil's Fork Trail Club, USA
DHAN Foundation, India
The Ecological Foundation, India
Ecology Center, USA
The Edmonds Institute, USA
Ekologistak Martxan, Basque Country, Spain
Erklärung von Bern (Berne Declaration), Switzerland
Environmental Foundation/Friends of the Earth, Sri Lanka
Environmental Liaison Centre International, Kenya
Environmental Monitoring Group, South Africa
EQUATIONS, India
Farmapu-inter&cecotrap-rcogl, Rwanda
Farmers' Link, UK
Fase- Federação de Órgãos para Assistência e Educacional, Brazil
FERN, UK
FIVAS, Norway
Food First/Institute for Food & Development Policy, USA
Food Matters, USA
Ford Alward Naturalist Association, Canada
Forever Green, Japan
Foro Boliviano del Medio Ambiente, Bolivia
Forum For A Better Hyderabad, India
49th Parallel Biotechnology Consortium, USA and Canada
Framtiden i våre hender (Future in our hands), Norway
Friends Circle, India
Friends of the Earth International
Friends of the Earth Norway, Norway
The Friends of the Liesbeek, South Africa
Fundacion Centro de Derechos Humanos y Medio Ambiente—(CEDHA), Argentina
Future in Our Hands Movement, UK
The Gaia Trust, UK
Global Exchange, USA
Global Resource Action Center for the Environment (GRACE), USA
Great Lakes United, USA
The Greater Kansas City Fair Trade Coalition, USA
The Green Campus Society, Canada
Green World Foundation, Thailand
Greenpeace International
Halifax Initiative Coalition, Canada
Hatof Foundation, Ghana
Horn of Africa Relief and Development Organization, Somalia
IMAH Institute for Development and Environment, Brazil
Indignación, Mexico
The Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy, USA
Institute of Science in Society, UK
Integrative Strategies Forum, USA
Inter-Environnement Wallonie, Belgium
The International Committee for the Global Water Contract
International Environmental Policy and Development-IEPD
International Forum on Globalization, USA
International Indian Treaty Council, USA
International Rivers Network, USA
INZET, The Netherlands
Isulethu Youth Development Trust, South Africa
Jagrata Juba Shangha (JJS), Bangladesh
KALIPTRA Sumatera, Indonesia
K.U.L.U.-Women and Development, Denmark
Latin America/Caribbean Committee of the Loretto Community
Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, USA
Manthan Adhyayan Kendra (Manthan Research Centre), India
Medical Mission Sisters
Micronesia Source Water Protection Coalition, Micronesia
Milieudedefensie (Friends of the Earth Netherlands), Netherlands
Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition, USA
Narmada Bachao Andolan, India
National Alliance of People's Movement, India
The National Council of Women of Canada, Canada
National Federation of Workers for Potable Water and Sewage of Peru (FENTAP), Peru
The Network for Consumer Protection, Pakistan
NGO Forum on Cambodia, Cambodia
NGO's & NCO's Association, Kyrgyz Republic
Norwegian Church Aid, Norway
Norwegian ForUM, Norway
Norwegian NGO Forum, WG on WTO and Sustainable Development, Norway
Ocean Arks International, USA
OGM Dangers, France
Organic Consumers Association, USA
OXFAM-Solidarity, Belgium
Pakistan Network of Rivers Dams and People, Pakistan
Patrick Environmental Awareness Group, USA
People and Water, Slovakia
Plataforma Peruana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo (PPDHDD), Peru
Polaris Institute, Canada
Projeto Brasil sustentável e Democrático, Brazil
Public Citizen, USA
Public Services International, France
Resource Center of the Americas, USA
Rights Implementation for Social Emancipation (RISE), Bangladesh
RISE—Rural Initiatives in Sustainability and Empowerment, Pakistan
Rural Reconstruction Nepal -RRN, Nepal
Safe Food Coalition, South Africa
Salmon Creek Watershed, USA
Sanctuary Asia, India
SANFEC, South Asia Network for Food, Ecology and Culture, India
SAROKAAR—Centre for Advocacy Studies, India
Social & Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC), Nigeria
The Social Justice Committee, Canada
Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, UK
Society for Water and Public Health Protection (SWAPHEP), Nigeria
SOS Selangor, Malaysia
Southern Links, UK
St. Joseph's Evening College, India
SUNGI Development Foundation, Pakistan
Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan
Taking Responsibility for the Earth and Environment (TREE), USA
Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), Philippines
Tebtebba, Philippines
Tomorrow Makers, Inc, USA
The Upper Eel Watershed Forum, Inc., USA
Urban Resource Center, Pakistan
Virginia Forest Watch, USA
WALHI—the Indonesia Forum for Environment, Indonesia
Washington Biotechnology Action Council, USA
Water and Energy Users' Federation (Wafed), Nepal
The Water Pressure Group, New Zealand
Water Stewards Network, USA
Wisconsin Fair Trade Campaign, USA
World Coalition Against Water Privatisation and Commodification
World Economy, Ecology & Development (WEED), Germany
WTO Watch Qld, Australia
XminY Solidarityfunds, Netherlands
Yakshi, India
Yardi & Sorée India Pvt. Ltd., India

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