

California Water Justice Delegation

Statement of Solidarity

In response to the upcoming 4th World Water Forum, to be held in Mexico City in March 2006, environmental justice, environmental, human rights, social justice and environmental health advocates from California would like to join voices with the many grassroots activists and organizations around the globe who are fighting to ensure their basic human right to safe and clean water. This is an important opportunity to raise international awareness about the movement for water justice in California, and to listen and learn from similar movements globally.

The 2006 California Water Justice Delegation offers its solidarity on several main principles:

1. Water is a fundamental human right;
2. Water is a public resource and should be managed for the benefit of all;
3. Water should be protected as a resource of the global commons and should not be commodified or have a value set according to the marketplace;
4. Water should be managed in a holistic, sustainable manner that meets the basic needs of all communities and the environment;
5. In California, 4 million people, predominately low-income communities and communities of color, lack access to clean water and many more are denied access to water for all its beneficial uses;
6. In California, this lack of access constitutes widespread water injustices that affect many communities in many different ways;
7. Internationally, many communities, predominately in the global south, suffer from a lack of proper sanitation and lack access to safe drinking water;
8. Internationally, many poor and/or indigenous communities have built powerful movements to demand community control of their water;
9. US organizations have much to learn from the international struggle to protect the water rights of poor and indigenous communities globally;
10. US organizations join their voices with the organizers of alternative public events surrounding the 4th World Water Forum. We support the efforts of communities who are struggling to gain access to the basic human right of water worldwide and for communities who are struggling to create forms of participatory water management.

Background information on California's Statement of Solidarity

1. Water is a fundamental human right.

Access to clean and safe water is a fundamental human right essential for a healthy population, environment, and economy. Water also has a spiritual and cultural significance to many communities that should be protected as all other rights are, and is sacred to many indigenous communities.

2. Water is a public resource and should be managed for the benefit of all.

Because water is essential for life, it must be managed for all people. Water is a public trust and a global resource, and there should be universal access to safe and clean water for all its uses, from drinking to cooking to religious ceremonies to recreation. Because of the importance of water to the environment, our health, and our cultural and spiritual practice, the global water supply must be managed to prioritize the basic needs of all people and ecosystems.

3. Water should be protected as a resource of the global commons and should not be commodified;

Water is a public resource, its value should not be set according to the marketplace. Water should remain in the public domain because it is so vital to the health and well-being of all peoples and ecosystems.

Increasingly, communities around the world have had their basic right to water threatened by corporate control of water resources. In an era of economic globalization and free trade agreements, provision of basic services such as sanitation systems is no longer prioritized. The international pressure and debt of many countries opens the door to extractive industries that harm water resources, to multinational corporations eager to run local water services, and deep cutbacks in government support for basic infrastructure needs. Corporate control of water globally has taken many forms, from behind-the-doors domination of water boards in California to takeover of basic service provision.

Water resources are increasingly being exploited for profit, from the bottling and sale of local springs to the provision of basic services at exorbitant prices. This increased exploitation has endangered the health of communities, infringed upon the ability of communities to manage their local water resources, and caused increased damage to ecosystems.

We support the declaration of water activists in Cochabamba, Bolivia, who fought against the privatization of their municipal water service:

Water is best protected by local communities and citizens who must be respected as equal partners with governments in the protection and regulation of water. People of the earth are the only vehicle to promote earth democracy and save water.

Cochabamba Declaration, December 8th, 2000

4. Water should be managed in a holistic, sustainable manner that meets the basic needs of all communities and the environment;

Water should be fairly managed to meet the needs of all people but also in a way that recognizes the importance of our role in protecting the environment. Equitable water management ensures that not only all people have their basic water needs met, but also that our vital water resources will be protected for future generations. Water management must integrate the entire ecosystem needs and take a comprehensive approach to using, restoring and protecting our common natural resources.

Forms of sustainable water management that work in conjunction with the natural hydrological cycle and ecosystem processes must be implemented. This could entail more water conservation policies, more sustainable agriculture, increased water use and reuse efficiency, better protection of local water supplies, increased prevention of pollution, and more careful land use planning and growth policies. The only way to ensure all people have their basic water needs met is to ensure our water management is more sustainable and holistic.

5. In California, many people, predominately low-income communities and communities of color, are denied access to water for all its beneficial uses.

In California, water injustices are widespread: many low-income communities and communities of color lack access to safe, affordable water for drinking, fishing, recreational and cultural uses. This injustice does not stem from too little water, but rather from racism, greed and exclusion. The development of water in California has been dominated by political structures that systematically exclude indigenous, poor and people of color communities. The result is that these communities bear the health burdens of an unsustainable system of water management and are excluded from the process of deciding who gets to use water in California and how.

6. In California, this lack of access constitutes widespread water injustices that affect many communities in many different ways.

Water injustices in California range from a lack of access to safe drinking water to lack of access to healthy fish for consumption. Rural communities in the agricultural heartland of California, the Central Valley, drink water from contaminated wells while large industrial farms next door receive clean water imported from far away mountains. Asian, African-American and Native American

anglers who fish out of necessity and tradition regularly consume fish that has been contaminated from chemicals and toxins that flow into our waterways. Native American Tribes are denied food, economic livelihood, and cultural practices because rivers have been dammed and diverted. Toxic sewage and storm run-off threaten public health in many urban communities. The threat of privatization is looming larger and larger for many communities, who have seen prices sky rocket and springs gobbled up by multinational corporations selling off a precious public resource.

Water justice, the ability of all communities to access safe, affordable water for drinking, fishing, recreational and cultural uses will only be achieved when we develop a participatory system of water governance and new, community-based forms of management.

7. Internationally, many communities, predominately in the global south, suffer from a lack of adequate sanitation and lack access to safe drinking water.

Globally, 1.4 billion people lack access to clean drinking water. Billions more lack adequate sanitation, leading to the spread of water borne diseases. More than five million people, mostly children, die every year from water-borne illnesses. By 2025, 3 billion people will be suffering from water shortages, over 80 percent of whom live in the global south. Governments and international agencies have failed to meet the basic needs of billions of people and led to substantial human suffering and deterioration in people's quality of life needlessly.

Poor and indigenous communities face increasing poverty and unequal access to resources. The failure of local governments to manage local water resources sustainably and for the benefit of all people has been compounded by pressure from international financial institutions, multinational corporations, development agencies, and foreign governments. Internationally, nationally and locally the urgent need to address the needs of communities is being ignored.

Indigenous communities have faced particular hardship in the face of loss of both lifestyle, culture, and economic livelihoods. Native groups have had their water resources stolen and their right to self-determination denied. They are often most drastically impacted by environmental degradation. This has not only led to impoverishment but also an irrevocable loss to the cultural identity of many indigenous communities.

8. Internationally, many poor and/or indigenous communities have built powerful movements to demand community control of their water.

The threat of privatization and the increasing health and environmental threats from lack of access to basic sanitation and clean water has prompted many grassroots campaigns internationally, demanding equal access to safe, affordable water and local control. Community organizations, grassroots groups, indigenous communities, and

poor communities in the global South have led a vibrant movement to gain access for all people to safe, clean affordable water for all its uses. The struggle over the public good of water has catalyzed broad social movements based on community self-determination and defense of the human right to water. From mass protests in Cochabamba, Bolivia, ousting French water giant Suez, to constitutional amendments in Paraguay protecting the public nature of water, to rerouting plumbing systems in South Africa, communities around the world have come together to prevent the loss of their water resources.

9. US organizations have much to learn from the international struggle to protect the water rights of poor and indigenous communities globally.

In California we are inspired by the courageous efforts of grassroots organizations around the globe, fighting for their fundamental rights to water. The international call for safe, clean, affordable water has pioneered the movement to defend water as a human right. The voices and concerns of poor and indigenous communities worldwide have led the way for many water justice advocates in California. While we fight to raise awareness for our own water injustices, we will continue in solidarity with the struggles for self determination and support the models for local control of water across the globe.

10. US organizations join their voices with the organizers of alternative public events surrounding the 4th World Water Forum. We support the efforts of communities who are struggling to gain access to the basic human right of water worldwide and for communities who are struggling to create forms of participatory water management.

The California Delegation would like to express our support for the Mexican network of organizations rallying *in defense of water*. While there are many diverse issues and points of view represented in the network of groups organizing additional public events outside the official World Water Forum, we respect the efforts to create an alternative space that permits true participation from all segments of society. We appreciate the efforts of Mexican and other non-governmental organizations to create a space of international dialogue and exchange for organizations around the globe.

We are inspired by the efforts to show multinational corporations, international financial institutions and transnational agencies what millions of people everyday face: a denial of their fundamental human right to water. We hope to join the struggle for water justice internationally and invite all organizations working on similar issues to join us here in California.

Sources: The People's Statement on the Right to Water, People's Health Movement; Indigenous Declaration on Water, Indigenous Environmental Network; *Blue Gold: The Global Water Crisis and the Commodification of the World's Water Supply*, by Maude Barlow, issued by the International Forum on Globalization; "The Human Right to Water," by Peter Gleick; "Indigenous Peoples and Water Rights," by Ellen Lutz, *Cultural Survival Quarterly*; *Thirsty for Justice: A People's Blueprint for California Water*, the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water; "Sustainability Principles," the California Water Impact Network.