



**Call to the People for the  
Alternative World Water Forum - AWWF**  
“Water is a fundamental right not a commodity”

**The appropriation of water in the global context**

United Nations resolutions recognize that water and sewage are fundamental rights. There is no life without water and it is a public welfare that must be shared among all humanity and other living beings.

Nature recreates itself and water is continually renewed in hydrological cycles. But our planet is intensely destroyed by human actions and activities. Global economic system is extremely predatory, producing negative synergy and cumulative impacts over environment, that causes climate changes, pollution and the destruction of essential ecosystems for water renewal. ok

Brazilian society's initiatives aimed to protect water has been incipient. Vital elements for the maintenance of natural cycles are still undefended: protection of forests for the continental transposition of humidity (flying rivers), essential for rain regulation; lack of adequate land use management in watershed territories for the protection of water sources (springs, rivers, reservoirs); maintenance and restoration of native vegetation; respect of limits of Permanent Preservation Areas and Conservation Units.

Civilizing rates are inhuman: water unequal distribution and scarcity are aggravated by the appropriation of water for commercial purposes. Large corporations promote a process of commodifying water in the usual pattern of the global market: profit from water and distribute dividends to a small group of investors. This is unacceptable! You can not buy rain, you can not buy sun ... It is a contradiction to make water mere merchandise and this will lead the world into an even more unfair and dangerous future.

It is unfair because it represents the domination of a few beneficiaries over the rights of all people. In 2016 Oxfam organization denounced that only 8 people in the world have the same wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest people. This inequality is also present in the possession of water. Corporations such as Nestlé, Evian, Cola-Cola, Pepsi-Co, Suez and Veolia dominate water sources around the world and directly intervene in the sovereignty of countries that own this wealth.

Transnational companies that use water as a production base have a great influence on the decisions about this resource, in the countries where they actuate and even in the UN itself. Banks in Wall Street (USA) and elsewhere in the world, beyond the fact of being



multibillionaires, are purchasing lands all over the world where there are water reserves demonstrating that there is great financial interest in those strategic territories. Water services privatization processes makes investments highly profitable.

Capitalism also leads to the loss of social, democratic, and communitarian control over natural resources, converting rights into commodities and limiting peoples' access to goods and services required for survival.

History has shown that ethical management is not a virtue of economic corporations, which go so far as to stimulate political and economic crises, to finance political coups and to impose states of exception. Several strategies to privilege economic interests are known, such as: frauds in biddings, blackmail, bribery, cooption, overbilling, and corruption. On the other hand, history has also revealed the struggle of peoples in the face of increasingly numerous and intense contradictions and conflicts over the use of water, in order to build a sustainable development model (ecological, social, spatial, cultural, financial, etc.) for countries and even continents, such as South America and Africa.

The concentration of rural and urban lands among few; the inappropriate use of soil and water caused by deforestation, soil impermeabilization, liquid and solid waste disposal; massive construction without proper water infrastructure projects, such as dams; besides soil, water and air contamination by the use of pesticides are the expression of a predatory model, which despoils not only human work, but also environmental and socio-cultural patrimony. There is destruction and exclusion, while there should be sustainability and protection of the environment and life, for the present and future generations.

If historically this has been an unfair process, it has now become dangerous. Pope Francis, through the encyclical *Laudato Si*, states: "It is foreseeable that, in the face of the exhaustion of some resources, a favorable scenario for new wars will be gradually created, disguised as noble claims (...). While the quality of available water is constantly deteriorating, there is a growing tendency in some places to privatize this limited resource (...). It is expected that water control by large global companies become a major source of conflict in this century".

This way, everyone must react and defend themselves against an economic model that considers water and nature as a mere market asset, imposing an ineffective model to provide access to water and sanitation for humanity as a whole. The management of common goods is not adequate for companies seeking profits, thus this will never be the basis of a sustainable, supportive and democratic economy, as it threatens living species, destroys Earth's ecosystems and peaceful coexistence among human beings.

### **Water as a common good**



Water is a common good. This leads us to understand that water management needs to consider the interests of local communities, especially those excluded or silenced by the strong voice of the market, through a democratic process of debate and decision on projects that interfere in water and land uses, particularly in cases of water infrastructure projects.

It is necessary to build a new water culture based on ethical, ecological and cultural values that guarantee inclusion, social and environmental justice, with a view to transparency and popular participation that is broad and representative of the different sectors of society.

The understanding that water is a common good that can not be managed by private interests is essential. Even when water services' management is in charge of the State, that, in theory should watch over common goods, social control and democratic participation should be implemented, otherwise large private interests can be prioritized by governors, as in cases of concessions for the use of mineral resources, public-private partnerships of public sanitation services, among others.

### **The negligence that kills**

Contaminated water kills more than half a million people a year and contributes to the spread of disease. In 80% of countries investment in water supply, sewage and hygiene are insufficient to meet the desired health targets.

According to the UN, about 663 million people in the world do not have access to adequate water supplies, 946 million practice outdoor defecation and: "polluted water is deadly for severely malnourished children as well as food shortage."

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warns that more than 800 children under the age of 5 die every day from diarrhea associated with lack of water and hygiene. Approximately 27 million people do not have access to safe drinking water in countries that are facing or are at risk of hunger - such as Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan.

### **Gender and access to water**

Gender inequality is also impacted by lack of access to water. Scarcity and poor distribution lead women to travel long and steep distances to get water.

UNICEF warns that globally, women and girls spend 200 million hours collecting water every day. They sacrifice themselves for the well-being of their families, for the nature around them, for the family agriculture and for the animals they raise. Feminization of poverty is



increasing. According to UN data, 70% of people living in poverty in the world are women, especially blacks, Latinas, indigenous people and immigrants.

Women are the main responsible for family and household care, so they have the continuous need to access safe fresh water and sanitary sewage, which is impeded by the logic of commoditization and omission of public authorities.

### **Water management in Brazil**

Sewage is deeply related to public health, especially with waterborne diseases. It is a fact that the more one invests, the less the health system is burdened, promoting collective health.

However, the report "Diagnosis of Water and Sewage Services" 2015, prepared by the Brazilian Ministry of Cities presents data from Brazilian reality: the levels for water supply through the public network were 83.3% and total sewage collection 50.3%. Only 42.7% of the total sewage generated was effectively treated. Brazilian outskirts, irregular neighborhoods, quilombos, indigenous villages and traditional communities concentrate those excluded from access to basic sanitation in the country.

In Brazil, regional government's sanitation companies and municipal autarchies have considerable expertise on the subject of basic sanitation, especially in water and sewage. But "outsourcing" of services, especially for the operation and maintenance of these systems, presents low quality results, affecting employees by high staff turnover and reduction or loss of benefits provided by the labor law. Furthermore, there are common problems encountered in private water management, such as lack of investment in infrastructure, rising tariffs and environmental damage.

Universal access to water with quality and completeness will only be possible with the strengthening of the State's role, sufficient public investments, transparency and social control.

The international experiences have been showing that public services implemented by the public power are the most appropriate ones.. The wave of privatization that has hit some cities in the 1990s, stimulated by international financial institutions and by giants operating hydropower, mainly in Europe, has now been reversed by the resumption of services by the municipalities.

Over the past 15 years, there have been reports of at least 180 cases of re-municipalization of sanitation services in 35 countries, both in the North and South. Of the 180 cases, 136



occurred in cities in the richest countries, including Atlanta and Indianapolis (USA), Accra (Ghana), Berlin (Germany), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Budapest (Hungary), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), La Paz (Bolivia), Maputo (Mozambique) and Paris (France).

Decommodification of public sanitation services is a task for the current generation, mainly those involving water and sewage, especially in countries of colonial origin such as Brazil, which has lived together with the spoliation of its natural heritage for centuries; where environmental losses, lack of investment for sustainability and water security are historical. In the medium-term this scenario points to the impossibility of correcting the harmful effects caused by the current model, which may condemn society to an insecure future.

### **CALL TO PEOPLE FOR THE ALTERNATIVE WORLD WATER FORUM esse**

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### **CALL TO PEOPLE FOR THE WORLD WATER ALTERNATIVE FORUM**

Collectively we reject corporate control of the natural heritage that is water. As citizens, trade unions, humanitarian and environmental organizations, we feel it is our duty and obligation to protest against market ownership of a fundamental human right. **Thus, we deliberate to call humanity to the realization of the ALTERNATIVE WORLD WATER FORUM - AWWF 2018.**

This initiative is imperative because in March 2018, Brazil will host the 8th edition of the World Water Forum (WWForum), an event organized by the World Water Council every three years since 1997, with tens of thousands of participants and a millionaire budget. The previous discussions point to the objective, even not totally explicit, of directing government decision-making and influencing public opinion towards a privatized view on water resources management.

The World Water Forum and its Council are linked to the large multinational corporations, which aim to boost the commodification of water; the intensification of watersheds transposition practices, which privilege meeting the demands of intensive agribusiness and heavy industry, at any cost, in detriment of its democratic management for the collectivity; the construction of dams that affect riverine populations without considering social and cultural impacts; the appropriation and control of underground aquifers; among others.

The situation imposed by the WWForum is characterized by the advance and predominance of the global market protagonism. The WWForum has become a space to promote business opportunities. Contrary to what it preaches, it is not democratic and inclusive - and it is up



to contemporary society to demystify its discourse, that presents itself as neutral and universal, when in fact it favors old formulas to make economic interests viable.

To oppose this mercantilist view and understanding that water is a right and not a commodity, a common good of humanity and all living beings, dozens of civil society entities, environmental protection institutions, trade union representation of workers, social and popular movements from Brazil and abroad, decided to hold the **ALTERNATIVE WORLD WATER FORUM - AWW 2018**, as it has happened before in other countries that hosted WWForum meetings. To organize the first steps, meetings took place in São Paulo from February 2017.

Our initiative questions the legitimacy of the World Water Forum as a political space for the promotion of discussion on global issues involving governments and civil society. We say NO to the World Water Forum, pointing to a lack of independence of the organizing council because it is committed to companies that have the commercialization of water as objective. This means an incompatible conflict between economic interests and a fundamental and inalienable right to water, a common good of humanity and all living beings.

### **Alternative World Water Forum's Goals - AWWF**

The main objectives of AWWF are:

- 1.** To be a democratic, transparent, participatory, decentralized and accessible event, which will take place simultaneously and in opposition to the World Water Forum. It will have the function of discussing problems related to water and sanitation, as a fundamental right, in its most varied interfaces, in search of solutions that represent sustainability and water security for humans and the maintenance of life on Earth.
- 2.** Sensitize and mobilize people on the theme and the problem of water and sanitation, undertaking wide public debate throughout the country in seminars, public classes, workshops, cultural activities, ecumenical acts, etc.
- 3.** Develop a sensitization / mobilization process that will serve to build and carry out the AWWF, aiming to place the debate permanently in society's agenda.
- 4.** Denounce the illegitimacy of the 8th WWForum and to make governments accountable for the use of public resources to the promotion of private interests.
- 5.** Propose and demand actions for governments, aiming at public policies of full access to water and sanitation, as a fundamental right and with broad recognition of the United Nations.



**6.** Strengthen the fight against the commoditization of water.

**7.** Use the slogan "WATER IS A RIGHT NOT A COMMODITY", aiming to popularize the theme, intensify actions and unify efforts of citizens, collectives and entities that work in the most varied areas related to water, such as water supply, sanitation and human rights, movements of people affected by dams, pesticides combating, agriculture, environment, housing, etc.

**8.** Make these actions a permanent process. First in the perspective of creating public spaces of discussion as popular committees for the construction of the Alternative World Water Forum, in all Brazilian states. Second, in another moment, to promote permanent organization, so that popular committees shaped for the construction of the Forum shall be transformed into committees for mobilization in defense of water and sanitation.

**9.** Enable these objectives with a broad articulation and support of citizens and organizations that can integrate with the process and collaborate with financial, material and human resources.

Finally, AWWF must portray and promote political awareness and the empowerment of society. It must bring to light what mankind can best expect, within the exercise of ethics in relation to life and its essential elements of support. In that matter, we call peoples to the ethical preservation of the water cycle for the protection of life and ecosystems, where all species grow and reproduce. Water must be at the service of peoples in a sovereign way, with distribution of wealth and under legitimate, popular, democratic, communitarian social control, free from conflicts of economic interests, thus guaranteeing justice and peace for humanity.

**Water is a right not a commodity!**

**Alternative World Water Forum – May de 2017**