



THE CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF CANADA

POSITION PAPER ON

WATER

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The Catholic Women's League of Canada
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The Catholic Women's League of Canada is the largest national organization of women in Canada with more than 102,000 members represented in every province and territory and in the military.

Through resolutions, League members have addressed concerns relating to water and their goal is to inspire political and community action and encourage greater understanding of the need for more responsible water use and conservation. The League believes that the human person must be foremost in any consideration of the issue of water.

Water is fundamental to life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a healthy life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite to the realization of all other human rights.¹

In his message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II stated that the destruction of the environment is symptomatic of a profound moral crisis: the lack of respect for life. The truth of this insight is immediately clear when one considers the interdependence of all members of the human family and the reliance upon the environment for life. Nowhere is this crisis more evident than in the destruction of clean or drinkable water, without which there can be no life.

Clean Drinking Water as a Basic Human Right

The League firmly believes that all the world's people should have access to clean drinking water as soon as possible. One of the key Millennium Development Goals, which Canada and 169 countries are committed to achieving by 2015, is to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. The League stands with the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the official development organization of the Canadian Catholic church, declaring that water is a sacred gift that connects all life and access to clean water is a basic human right.

Water Quality in Canada

The League supports national water quality standards for Canada's present and future water supply.² To ensure that the same standards of water quality apply throughout Canada, testing for all parameters identified in the *Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality* should be legislated by the federal government. All Canadians need to become better informed about the quality of water in their communities and about products they use that contaminate water.

Bulk Fresh Water Resources

The League believes that prohibiting bulk removal from Canadian waters is comprehensive, environmentally sound, respects constitutional responsibilities and is consistent with Canada's trade obligations.³ If even one province allows water exports, trade rules state that every province must allow them, with no limit on quantities to be exported. Big corporations see a phenomenally profitable market in Canada and are exerting tremendous pressure on the federal government to let

¹ UN Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights

² CWL Resolution 2001.04 *Water Quality in Canada*

³ CWL Resolution 1999.09 *Bulk Fresh Water Resources*

them exploit it. The League insists on government action to ban bulk exports of water and continue to exclude water services from international trade agreements.

Privatization of Water Services

The League is concerned about the risks of privatization, especially about increasing the cost of water without satisfying the thirst of the world=s poorest people. Assuring supplies for all can be best achieved through accountable stewardship and accountable public control of water resources.

Large water corporations in the world have the majority of the existing private world water market. A large part of the private sector is also composed of local entrepreneurs who supply water because the public or state suppliers fail to serve their citizens. Privatized water services earn profits for the shareholders at the expense of the poor.

Water Conservation

League members have been urged to become knowledgeable and raise awareness about water use, promote good practices and mobilize resources to manage water in a sustainable way. The League believes that conservation of water is vital. Leaders of all countries must recognize the importance of water and their obligation and responsibility to ensure that all citizens have access.

Loss of water through leakage, illegal hook-ups and waste amounts to about 50% of water for drinking. Much water for irrigation is also wasted by poor irrigation practices. With world=s rivers increasingly depleted and polluted, freshwater sources are increasingly rare. According to the World Water Council, if nothing is done to reverse current trends, 2.5 billion people will lack access to drinkable water by 2025.⁴

Conclusion

The Catholic Women=s League of Canada recognizes the interdependence of all members of the human family and our reliance on the environment for life. We know that, with the destruction of water, there can be no life.

Drinking water, including its quality, distribution, privatization, conservation, and related concerns, is a major issue in our time. The Catholic Women=s League of Canada restates the urgency to use and protect our water resources in a sustainable and controlled environment to make them available for future generations.

⁴ *Solidarité*, a publication of KAIROS