



## **justice, peace & creation concerns**

### **ecumenical earth**

*climate change / water / biotechnology / economic globalization & ecology*

#### **documents, resources, links**

- **climate change**
- **water**
- **biotechnology**
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### **Water**

The UN Decade on Fresh Water (2005-2015) points to the fact that water is a vital ingredient for both the diversity of life on earth and for human well-being.

Access to fresh water supplies is becoming an urgent matter of life and death across the planet. The world is on the verge of a serious water crisis in which the survival of many communities in various parts of the globe is at risk. Biodiversity is also threatened by the depletion and pollution of fresh water resources.

There are two dimensions to the current crisis: the effects on the ecology of the planet and the injustice facing particular vulnerable communities in South and North.

- The survival of 1.2 billion people is currently in jeopardy due to lack of adequate water and sanitation. For the same reason, the lives of 6,000 children are lost every day. For those struggling with HIV/AIDS, poor or no water is yet another barrier to overcome.
- In today's world unequal access to water causes conflicts between and among people, communities, regions and nations. These conflicts exist in areas where there is a lack of water or where the main part of the water resource is polluted. Very often in these situations the poorest people bear the heaviest burden.

At the same time fragile ecosystems are under direct threat. These include loss of marine species due to pollution and over-fishing; water levels of underground courses and lakes dropping due to excessive extraction; wetlands drying out prompting the death of flora and fauna.

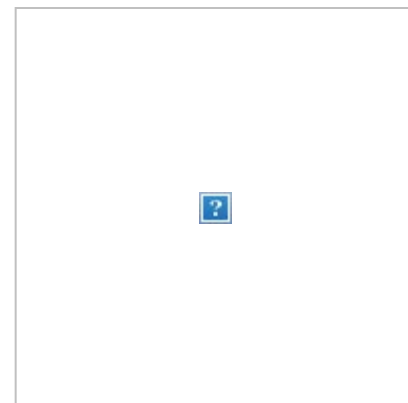
Churches, church-related agencies and ecumenical organisations have formed an Ecumenical Water Network to improve their co-operation in response to these challenges.



SEK-FEPS Swiss-Brazilian ecumenical water declaration



**"Waters of Life" - Ecumenical water network**



*Girls fetching water from a well, Afghanistan*

**+ Documents, resources, links on water**

### **Pressing issues**

The following four water issues need special urgent attention at this time:

#### **• Ecological threat**

There is a close connection between water and Climate Change. Factors such as deforestation, intense production methods and consumer demand, which lead to Climate Change have also impacted on the availability of fresh water. As climatic patterns change so weather systems are affected, prompting features such as extreme rainfall, prolonged droughts, melting ice and rising sea levels. The ecology of whole regions is under severe pressure, although, more positively, the planting of new vegetation encourages precipitation in drier areas.

### • **Production and consumption lifestyles**

In our global, interconnected world, water can no longer be just a local issue. Consumer habits are wasting water directly and indirectly, within and across regions. For example, intense farming of single crops to supply the demands of consumers, makes huge demands on water supplies. Massive factory manufacture of plastic products or intensive agricultural production which depends on continual irrigation, divert water away from the needs of local communities, both human and non-human.

Water should be treated as a social good and a human right rather than as a commodity or commercial product. It must be ensured that there are affordable pricing systems under public accountability. The costs to consumers should be re-directed to the benefit of the community rather than for private profit.

### • **Commercialization**

There is a need to question the trend to commercialization of water resources and services promoted especially by Western European based trans-national corporations active in the water sector together with international financial institutions. The loss of public control and participation of people and communities in water management at all levels is a serious matter. It is essential that local control of localised water supplies is given higher priority.

### **Solidarity with vulnerable communities**

Access to water is uneven. Some communities are very much more vulnerable than others. These include low-lying countries and regions, where the primary threat is rising sea levels. Elsewhere, many communities are endangered by changing rainfall patterns or by the speeding up of the melting of permanent ice, which influence national and international river systems.

As members of the Body of Christ it is imperative to live in mutual support of one another. Special attention should be paid to those who are the most vulnerable. The equitable sharing of water is an essential expression of global solidarity and a practical response to the commandment to create a just society together.

Furthermore, the lifestyle of vulnerable human (and non human) communities, often more sensitive to the natural rhythms of life, provides some insights into ways and means for sustainability.

### **Christian faith and action**

The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God's grace in perpetuity. It is a basic condition for all life on Earth and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. It is therefore right to speak out and to act when this life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat.

Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation. The Church, as today's Body of Christ, needs to heal and reconcile the brokenness of the world, and to prevent further brokenness and decay in the future. We therefore choose life over death, and wish to protect the Waters of Life for all.

Both locally and internationally there are positive and creative responses to raise the profile of Christian witness to water issues. In the face of such problems the action taken increasingly by churches and church agencies across the globe is very much welcomed. However, it is vital that greater priority is given to water issues within our church denominations and confessions.

Church-based agencies, which are close to local communities are in the position of being able to implement policies to bring about change. Enjoying the trust of people at local levels, they can draw on their religious and cultural values to speak out in truth against destruction and death. They can transcend vested interests and independently mobilise resources to tackle the symptoms and causes of water-related poverty.

It is essential for churches and Christian agencies to develop partnerships with others with similar ethical principles, including other faith traditions and NGOs. This is important to create shared goals on water policy and practice for the future of civil society. Technological and short-term economic perspectives are not sufficient in determining the future of the world's water.

It is also necessary for church organizations, together with others, to engage in debate and action on water policies, including dialogue with governments and multilateral or corporate institutions. This is essential to promote the significance of human rights and the common good, and to point to alternative ways of living

which are more respectful of ecological processes and more sustainable in the longer term.

In all these ways our churches can, and should, press for greater engagement at all levels to facilitate urgent action for change.

**+ Documents, resources, links on water**

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