



STATEMENT OF FORTALEZA

We, the participants in the Meeting for a New Water Culture in Latin America, declare that:

Water is essential for life in the planet and, therefore, for human society. We believe that access to safe water is a human right.

The crisis of sustainability inflicted on our ecosystems by an ill-understood notion of progress has caused that over 1.3 billion people (about 17% of the world population) have no access to potable water, while over 2.4 billion people (around 40% of the world population) have no access to basic sanitation. As a result, one person dies every 7 seconds from water-related illnesses. This crisis is reflected in cities and rural communities as well as in aquatic ecosystems and aquifers. However, the water territories continue to be destroyed and degraded, often irreversibly. These are two sides of the same problem.

Beyond the economic utility of water for agriculture, industry, or energy production, rivers, lakes, glaciers, swamplands, forests, and aquifers play a crucial role in the biosphere as well as in the sustenance and cohesion of communities. These water bodies also represent natural common goods that mark the identity of territories and people.

Accepting the challenge of sustainability requires profound changes in the conception of nature, as well as in attitudes and life styles. Among other issues, it requires developing a New Water Culture that acknowledges the multiple emotional, cultural, social, environmental, and economic values at stake, adopting ethical approaches grounded on the principles of equity and sustainability.

A New Water Culture that acknowledges the wisdom of Latin America's ancestral cultures, and recognizes the value of traditional good practices and technologies such as rainwater harvesting, while also incorporating the opportunities offered by the newly available technologies.

A New Water Culture that recognizes the specific role that women have in those communities where access to safe water and sanitation is difficult and tackles the problem of gender discrimination.



The ecosystems must be managed ethically, with participation and under the responsibility of communities and public institutions in order to guarantee water conservation and the human right to potable water and ecologically sound sanitation services.

On another count, according to the Report of the World Commission on Dams it is estimated that during the XX Century between 40 and 80 million people were forced to abandon their territories that were flooded to build large dams, which caused a truly hydrological holocaust. In these forced displacements, often carried out by violent means, the human rights of the affected communities have been violated, while many assassinations that have been and continue to be committed in the process remain silenced and unpunished. In Latin America, in many cases the indigenous communities have been and continue to be dispossessed from their ancestral collective rights to their territories and ecosystems in the name of a general interest that is often no more than the interest of the rich and the powerful.

Latin America has been confronting mega-projects that have fuelled increasing social unrest, such as those proposed in the Puebla-Panama Plan or The Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA), which includes industrial hydroways such as the Paraguay-Paraná system. There also exist many other large projects involved in controversy, such as the La Parota Dam in Mexico, the interconnection between the Negro and Orinoco rivers in the Amazon, water transfers like the one projected in the San Francisco River in Brasil, or multiple dam systems such as the highly disputed Baba-Quevedo-Vinces project in Ecuador or the dams in the Patagonian rivers.

These projects have the potential to endanger the principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability, and therefore must be subject to a wide public debate, with open access to the relevant information needed for informed participation.

Massive deforestation, systematic pollution owing to industrial, extractive, agricultural and urban effluents, desiccation of swamplands, agribusiness expansion, large-scale maritime and fluvial navigation, increasing emissions of greenhouse gases, among other processes, are breaking down the water cycle and destroying the sources of the food sovereignty of many human communities. These include the degradation of fisheries in rivers, mangroves, and littoral areas, which threatens the continuity of life in the planet and, especially, the survival of the most disadvantaged.



In the face of this ecological and social tragedy, it is unacceptable that public institutions excuse themselves from taking much needed action arguing impotence, being complacent or even active promoters of the tragedy with the argument of favouring economic growth.

Water management neoliberal policies, particularly in relation to water and sanitation services, are leading to the privatization of essential public services and the loss of people and community's sovereignty and control over their territories and ecosystems. In most cases, these policies that have been agreed by governments, transnational companies, and the international financial institutions have failed to solve the problems of access to safe water and sanitation. Moreover, these policies tend to exclude the most vulnerable groups through the commodification of essential public services that had been historically considered to be a universal social right and a state responsibility.

It is true that in many cases public bodies have been and continue to be inefficient and bureaucratic. However, it is increasingly evident that substituting these bodies by private companies, most of them transnational, and market relations has worsened the situation. From the New Water Culture we propose new management models of efficient public management based on transparency, access to information, and social participation and control in decision making and in the implementation of the relevant policies. Developing these new models requires far-reaching legal and institutional reforms for the democratization of the management of water and essential water services and to eradicate corruption.

The model of globalization imposed by financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the Inter American Development Bank, is being reinforced in Latin America through the bilateral and multilateral agreements, based on the pretence of fostering "free trade" but that in practice endanger the democratic and sustainable management of water in the continent.

In the face of these challenges, Latin America has counteracted with the exemplary popular reaction in defence of the common goods, be aquatic ecosystems, aquifers or essential public services, as well as with successful experiences of participatory public service management with high levels of efficiency in water and sanitation services. These processes taking place in Latin America bring renewed hope for the rest of the world.

Meeting the gigantic challenges facing Latin America will require that education, social mobilization and citizen formation, giving special consideration to the artistic and



cultural dimensions in the development of these processes, become the structuring elements in the construction of the New Water Culture that we need. In this regard, there is also a need for renewed efforts to foster the convergence between social movements and the scientific-academic community, which was the central objective of our Meeting, in order to bring about efficient, equitable, and sustainable alternatives.

This Meeting for a New Water Culture in Latin America gathered over five hundred people from over thirty countries. The participants enjoyed five days of enriching exchanges, enhanced by the diversity of cultures and movements, by the contributions of the scientific experts and the institutions that were represented, and by the artistic manifestations that provided so much dynamism and enjoyment to the event. We experienced very moving moments listening to the well-documented denunciations of grave offences to human rights and to the sustainability of our ecosystems, not only in Latin America but also in other regions, and we expressed our solidarity with the affected communities and individuals. We were also touched by the reports describing specific citizen struggles for environmental justice, not least because many of the participants were actors in those struggles for the future of the Blue Planet, Planet Water.

We left Fortaleza stronger because we are more united, more convinced of the need to continue in the solidary struggle to overcome the water crisis in Latin America and the world.

City of Fortaleza, State of Ceará, Brazil

9 December 2005

Note: The Meeting took place on 5-9 December 2005 in Fortaleza, and had over 500 participants from all Latin American Countries plus representatives from Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Bangladesh, Ukraine, the United States of North America, France, Morocco, Poland, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain.