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Common text 1

Ecumenical Declaration on water as a human right and a public good



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CNBB

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CONIC

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We, the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches of Brazil and Switzerland – represented by our leaders, inspired by local initiatives taken in our parishes and encouraged by the declarations of the worldwide fellowship of churches – on the UN's «Water for Life» international decade for action (2005–2015).

1. We acknowledge

- *That water is a basic precondition for all life*. Without water there is no life. Having or not having access to water determines life or death. Water is a gift of God, which he offers to all so that they may use it responsibly for fullness of life. Thus water is in principle a public good which is not to privatise.

- *Water is a human right.* The «right to adequate food» is set down in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 25) and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 11). In putting this into practice the problems and specific needs of women must be considered: in many countries woman (and children, particularly girls) bear the responsibility for providing water with consequences for women's health, through carrying heavy burdens, and for young girls who are thus prevented from attending school.

- *Water is a force of faith*. Water is not only an economic commodity it also has a social, cultural, medical, religious and mystical value. In the story of creation we read that «the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.» (Gen.1.2). Through Moses God provided his pilgrim people in the desert with water. For us as Christians the symbolic force of water is found in baptism, «The one who believes and is baptized will be saved.» (Mk.16.16). For many peoples and cultures water has a sacred significance and has value linked to its capacity to forge community and its ritual and traditional properties.

- *Water is becoming scarce for many human beings.* The high pro capita use of water, population growth, wastage, lifestyle, destruction of for-

ests, land and water reserves require that particular attention be given to water and to setting priorities for how it is used.

2. We demand

- *That the human right to water be recognized at the local and international level* in the same way as the right to adequate food. This right must be respected by all sectors of society but states have a particular responsibility in this area. «General Observation» No15 of the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and «the voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security» (in particular directive 8c) adopted by the international community at the FAO in November 2004, must be put in place without delay.

- *That water must be treated as a public good.* The State must take over the commitment to guarantee access to drinking water to all of the population. This guarantee includes fixing an affordable price for water, making the necessary technical and financial means available, as well as involving local councils and communities in decisions relevant to them on the use of available water resources. Treating water as a public good also implies the commitment of states to regulate the use of water resources by peaceful means, in such a way that the right to water for all of the inhabitants of neighbouring states also be respected.

- *That in terms of water consumption legal priorities need to be laid down.* The first is quenching the thirst of human beings and animals and ensuring the supply of water to food crops. This presupposes a preventative approach to environmental policy, in the spirit of solidarity between local governments, countries and peoples.

- That the right to water should be regulated through *an international convention on water* to be adopted by the UN.

3. We commit ourselves

- to convince our churches, congregations, institutions, ecumenical groupings and partner organisations *to support this declaration* and to pray for its aims;

- together with the movements and NGOs in Brazil and Switzerland interested in these issues, *to motivate public opinion*, political forces and the population of our countries to work in favour of the terms set out in this declaration and to oppose to the tendency of privatisation;

- to lobby the *governments of our countries* to guarantee, through appropriate laws, the human right to water and to declare water as a public good, and to work for the drawing up of an international convention on water to be adopted by the UN.

Fribourg, 22 April 2005

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