

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility

Working Group on Water & Food Statement of Principles

Water

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

GENESIS 1:9-10

We made from water every living thing.

THE QUR'AN 21:30

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life.

REVELATION 21:6

He sends down saving rain for them when they have lost all hope and spreads abroad His mercy.

THE QUR'AN 25:48

Water is sacred. It belongs to the Earth and to all life that inhabits our blue planet.

All the water on Earth has existed since the Creation and it is continually recycled. However, less than 3% of the Earth's water is freshwater, which is indispensable to human beings and other life forms, and only one third of this is accessible.¹

It is imperative that the Earth's freshwater be protected and conserved.

Water is a human right recognized by the United Nations.² Yet over one billion people (one sixth of the world's population) lack access to freshwater that is safe for human consumption and 2.4 billion people lack water for basic sanitation.³ Every day 6,000 children die from diseases associated with lack of access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene.⁴

Every person has a right to an adequate supply of safe water to meet essential needs.

Global demand for freshwater doubles every twenty years, twice as fast as population growth. Water consumption per capita, however, varies greatly among nations, with the richest industrialized countries consuming many times more water than the poorest developing nations.⁵

Humans appropriate 54% of the Earth's accessible freshwater and by 2028 this figure could rise to 90%.⁶ Agriculture accounts for 70% of human global water consumption, industrial production uses another 22%, and household uses consume the remainder.⁷

It is everyone's duty to use water sparingly and with great care so that all living things may share in this sacred resource.

The world is fast approaching a freshwater crisis due to ecologically unsustainable human practices. Surface waters have been polluted with sewage, toxic industrial wastes and agricultural chemicals.⁸ Underground aquifers, where 97% of the Earth's available freshwater is stored, are being depleted faster than the rate of replenishment.⁹

The growth of cities and construction of roads cover the landscape with impermeable surfaces that prevent rainwater from being reabsorbed into freshwater systems. The filling of wetlands and destruction of forests, the diversion of rivers for agriculture and hydro-electric dams further disrupt hydrological cycles.¹⁰

The warming of our planet due to accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will wreck havoc on freshwater supplies by accelerating evaporation of surface waters and prolonging drought in many areas. Predicted temperature increase in the coming years will diminish snow pack needed to replenish watersheds and raise sea levels, causing inundation of coastal areas and salt-water contamination of wetlands and groundwater.¹¹

Many unsustainable practices that are destroying our planet's ecology are driven by short-term profit seeking that fails to account for the lasting damage being done.

Environmentally unsustainable activity must be discouraged, for example, by requiring that the full costs of long-term ecological damage be assessed and paid for by the responsible parties.

¹ 2003 International Year of Freshwater, Facts and Figures, http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php@URL_ID=1462&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.htm

² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Articles 11 and 12; General Comment No. 15 on the Right to Water, November 2002, U.N Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: "the human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient; affordable; physically accessible; safe and acceptable water for personal and domestic uses".

³ UNICEF, Water, Environment and Sanitation, http://www.unicef.org/wes/index_statistics.html

⁴ 2003 International Year of Freshwater, Facts and Figures, Water and Sanitation , http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php@URL_ID=4096&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁵ Annual per capita consumption in the United States exceeds 1,800 cubic meters, while in Japan it is 735 cubic meters, Germany 579 cubic meters, China 439 cubic meters; South Africa 366 cubic meters and Bangladesh 133 cubic meters. World Resources Institute, Earth Trends, http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable_db/index.cfm

⁶ 2003 International Year of Freshwater, Facts and Figures, Different Water Users, http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php@URL_ID=1607&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁷ UNESCO, World Water Assessment Program, Water and Industry, http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/facts_figures/water_industry.shtml

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ World Policy Institute, http://www.earth-policy.org/Indicators/indicator7_data2.htm

¹⁰ UNESCO, World Water Assessment Program, Protecting Ecosystems, http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/facts_figures/protecting_ecosystems.shtml;

Barlow, Maude and Clarke, Tony, *Blue Gold*, pp. 10-12. The New Press (2002)

¹¹ U.S. EPA, Global Warming Impacts, <http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/content/ImpactsWaterResources.htm>