

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OUR WATER IS NOT FOR SALE

OTTAWA—The Common Front to protect water, calls on the Chrétien Government to deliver the goods on legislation designed to prohibit the export of Canadian Water and to safeguard public control of this resource.

The Council of Canadians, the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) are part of this broad-based group.

"This government promised it would table legislation this session that would prohibit the export of water. Corporations are planning to turn our water resources into an export commodity – yet the Chrétien government remains silent," stated Maude Barlow, chairperson of the Council of Canadians.

"Should water be treated like any other commodity? Will Canadians continue to have affordable publicly controlled access to clean water? These questions are especially important given free trade agreements like NAFTA. Until legislation is passed, Parliament must enact a moratorium on the export of water immediately," added Barlow.

"There is no forum examining the many environmental impacts of taking water from its natural setting. The Great Lakes are experiencing the lowest water levels in 34 years thanks to the growing impact of climate change," stated Sarah Miller spokesperson for CELA. "Less water will mean more conflict in the next century among users and countries. Big business is banking on water becoming the oil of the next century and Canadians need to say no," said Miller.

"What is more fundamental to democracy than control over the water we drink? asked Judy Darcy, CUPE national president. "Access for all Canadians to a basic source of life is what's at stake. Water resources and services must be publicly and democratically controlled." CUPE represents over 460,000 workers in communities across Canada and is establishing Water Watch committees in cooperation with concerned citizens and environmental activists in many of these communities.

"Multinational corporations are trying to privatize water services in hundreds of Canadian municipalities and turn our water resources into an export commodity. They can't buy the air we breathe, so now they want to buy and control the water we drink. What we are saying is simple – no water for profit," concluded Darcy.

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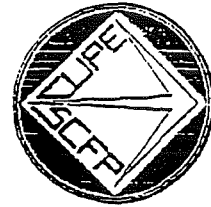
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Common Front to Protect Water

Canadian social activists, trade unionists and environmental groups have formed a common front to protect water.

The initial participants in the common front are: the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Council of Canadians.

The common front is organizing a campaign with three major objectives:

- a.. Oppose Water Exports
- b.. Stop Privatization of Municipal Water Services
- c.. Promote water conservation, protection of water quality and healthy aquatic ecosystems

Our first target is to pressure the federal government to honour its promises to prohibit the bulk export of water. This needs to be realized through federal legislation banning large scale water exports (including water export by tanker) and by ensuring that trade and investment agreements (such as the NAFTA and the proposed MAI) do not threaten Canada's water.

We have adopted the following brief statement and set of principles:

Water is of immeasurable importance to Canada's environment, economy, public health and identity. Canada's rivers, lakes and groundwater have shaped our history, powered our industrial development, sustained our health, and nourished our spirits. Nevertheless, Canadians can no longer take water for granted. In addition to the many factors that threaten water quality and aquatic ecosystem health in Canada, we are in danger of losing public control of water resources and management. Increasingly, water is being regarded as a commodity that can be bought and sold on the market. There are now several active proposals to export Canadian water by bulk shipments or by diverting rivers. In addition, private corporations are gaining a foothold in the management of public water services such as drinking water and sewage treatment.

In light of these and other trends, we recognize the following principles:

a.. Water is a public trust. All Canadians have the right and the responsibility to be involved in the major decisions affecting water in Canada.

a.. An adequate supply of clean water for peoples' daily living needs is a basic human right. This right is best ensured by keeping water and sewage services in the public sector, by regulating the protection of water supplies and by promoting the efficient use of water.

a.. It is wrong – environmentally, economically and morally – to engage in the large-scale trade of water. Water must not be regarded as a commodity for exchange in the international marketplace. Adequate supplies of clean water for people in water-scarce regions can only be ensured by promoting conservation and protection of local water resources. Importing water is not an economically or environmentally sustainable strategy for dealing with water scarcity.

a.. Water is the lifeblood of the environment as well as an essential resource for humans. Each generation must ensure that the abundance and quality of water is not diminished as a result of its activities. Greater efforts must be made to restore the health of aquatic ecosystems that have already been degraded as well as to protect others from harm.

Proposed components of federal legislation to prohibit water exports

- The federal government should pass a law to prohibit large scale water exports, including by diversion and by tanker, while permitting exports of bottled water. As a cutoff point, we suggest water should not be exported in containers larger than 20 litres. There is a precedent for this in the 1995 British Columbia Water Protection Act.
- The federal government has well-recognized jurisdiction over international trade. Therefore, the federal government has the constitutional authority to prohibit water exports (under s. 92(2) [trade and commerce] of the Constitution Act, 1867).
- The main rationale for this legislation is to protect the environment. There are sound environmental reasons for prohibiting large scale water exports, including by tanker.
- As we have noted in the past, the legislation is bound to run afoul of trade agreements. In our view the best way to avoid this is to change the agreements. Nevertheless, we have structured our proposal in a way that offers the smallest possible target for a challenge under GATT or NAFTA. This is done by means of providing a strong environmental rationale for the prohibition of water exports.
- This legislation must fit into the context of a broad national water policy that promotes water conservation in Canada and discourages major diversions of rivers. Otherwise, a prohibition of water exports will be regarded as hypocritical.

