



World Council of Churches
9th Assembly
14-23 February 2006
Porto Alegre, Brazil

Statement on Water for life

1. Water is a symbol of life. The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God's grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation (Gen 2:5ff). It is a basic condition for all life on Earth (Gen 1:2ff.) and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation (Rom 8:19 ff., Rev 22). As churches, we are called to participate in the mission of God to bring about a new creation where life in abundance is assured to all (John 10:10; Amos 5:24). It is therefore right to speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat.

2. Access to freshwater supplies is becoming an urgent matter across the planet. The survival of 1.2 billion people is currently in jeopardy due to lack of adequate water and sanitation. Unequal access to water causes conflicts between and among people, communities, regions and nations. Biodiversity is also threatened by the depletion and pollution of fresh water resources or through impacts of large dams, large scale mining and hot cultures (irrigation) whose construction often involves the forced displacement of people and disruption of the ecosystem. The integrity and balance of the ecosystem is crucial for the access to water. Forests build an indispensable part in the ecosystem of water and must be protected. The crisis is aggravated by climate change and further deepened by strong economic interests. Water is increasingly treated as a commercial good, subject to market conditions.

3. Scarcity of water is also a growing source of conflict. Agreements concerning international watercourses and river basins need to be more concrete, setting out measures to enforce treaties made and incorporating detailed conflict resolution mechanisms in case disputes erupt.

4. Both locally and internationally there are positive and creative responses to raise the profile of Christian witness to water issues.

5. Churches in Brazil and in Switzerland, for instance, have made a Joint Ecumenical Declaration on Water as a Human Right and a Common Public Good – by itself an excellent example for ecumenical co-operation. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew states that water can never be regarded or treated as private property or become the means and end of individual interest. He underlines that indifference towards the vitality of water constitutes both a blasphemy to God the Creator and a crime against humanity. Churches in various countries and their specialised ministries have joined together in the Ecumenical Water Network in working for the provision of freshwater and adequate sanitation and advocating for the right to water. Access

to water is indeed a basic human right. The United Nations has called for an International Decade for Action, Water for Life, 2005 to 2015.

6. It is essential for churches and Christian agencies to work together and to seek co-operation with other partners, including other faith traditions and NGOs, and particularly those organizations that work with vulnerable and marginalized populations who hold similar ethical convictions. It is necessary 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 the right to water and to point to alternative ways of living, which are more respectful of ecological processes and more sustainable in the longer term.

Proposals

That the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Porto Alegre, Brasil 14-23 February 2006:

- a) **adopts** the statement on Water for Life and calls on the churches and ecumenical partners to work together with the aim to:
- b) **promote** awareness of and take all necessary measures for preservation and protection of water resources against over-consumption and pollution as an integral part of the right to life;
- c) **undertake** advocacy efforts for development of legal instruments and mechanisms that guarantee the implementation of the right to water as a fundamental human right at the local, national, regional and international levels;
- d) **foster** co-operation of churches and ecumenical partners on water concerns through participation in the Ecumenical Water Network;
- e) **support** community based initiatives whose objectives are to enable local people to exercise responsible control, manage and regulate water resources and prevent the exploitation for commercial purposes;
- f) **urge** governments and international aid agencies to give priority to and allocate adequate funds and other resources for programmes designed to provide access to and make water available to local communities and also promote development of proper sanitation systems and projects, taking into account the needs of people with disabilities to have access to this clean water and sanitation service;
- g) **monitor** disputes and agreements related to water resources and river basins to ensure that such agreements contain detailed, concrete and unambiguous provisions for conflict resolution;
- h) **contribute** to the International Decade for Action, Water for Life, 2005 – 2015, by exploring and highlighting the ethical and spiritual dimension of water crisis.

Approved on February 21, 2006, by the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006,