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## THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF WATER WISDOM

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The outcome of a democratic debate and knowledge sharing  
process about water management

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Le secrétariat international de l'eau  
The International Secretariat for Water  
El secretariado internacional del agua

Version 3  
September 27 2002



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## **THE SITUATION**

Despite major efforts undertaken over the past 20 years in order to improve the situation around the world, one person in four is still deprived of access to safe drinking water and one person in three does not have access to sanitation. Over 5 million people, mostly women and children, die every year of water-borne diseases and other illnesses related to poor water quality. It is sad to note that at the beginning of the third millennium, the basic conditions for human dignity and equality in water are still not in place. This distressful situation partly results from the fact that citizen-users - in particular women in developing countries - are not involved in the debate or the solutions.

Stakeholders in water management talk much about participation and empowerment of the poor, however little or nothing has been done to give them the power and the tools to manage water resources themselves.

This lack of democracy, combined with limited access to water, creates conflicts between individuals, communities and nations.



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## The ISSUES

The debate on solidarity in water management and governance highlights the relationship between the resource's ecological sustainability, local/national development or poverty and security. These linkages interweave at the local, national and international levels and challenge current modalities of water management and international aid (debt, public and private funding). Water has become a major concern as well as an ideological issue. The main schools of thought concerning water are the following:

### **Water as a saleable commodity**

This point of view is essentially shared by private international corporations competing for the control of markets for water supply, sanitation and water treatment, mainly in urban areas

### **Water as an economic and social good:**

This point of view could be called the "Dublin-Rio consensus" since it is shared by the main institutional stakeholders at national and international levels. Despite this consensus, the various stakeholders have been unable to translate water supply and sanitation priorities into concrete results for all human beings

### **Water as an ecological and environmental entity**

This point of view is mainly shared by the main NGO's at national and international levels working towards the adoption and implementation of integrated and holistic water management respecting the nature and the environment

### **Water as a human right and responsibility**

This more recent point of view (Water for People) is the result of the work of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council and various associations in the context of the World Vision for Water. This Vision promotes the adoption and the implementation of the fundamental human right to drinking water and sanitation in order to clearly define the stakeholders' rights and responsibilities and develop the proper tools to ensure those rights are respected

### **Water as a common heritage**

This point of view is shared by a number of associations and scientists who agree on the fact that water and its management cannot be privatised or used to generate private-sector profits



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## A CONSULTATION PROCESS

The **International Secretariat for Water** and its members, **Green Cross** and **Alliance Maghreb-Machrek pour l'Eau**, with other partners launched a process for democratic debate and knowledge sharing about water management.

The process is part of the preparatory activities for the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto and will be validated by The World Assembly of Water Wisdom that will be convened in the Agora of the House of the Citizen and the Water and its Gardens of Governance in Kyoto, in March 2003.

This initiative, which promotes people-centred approaches, reinforces Prince of Orange Willem Alexander's strong message: "*No water, no future*" to which we are adding a new dimension: - *no future without peoples' participation and no participation without human and financial resources.*

### Goals of the Process

Enable individuals and/or groups who are generally excluded from such processes, to contribute and participate in the search for solutions.

Unlock and share expertise developed by NGOs, community groups and citizen associations with their local partners in water management (drinking water, sanitation and hygiene).

Promote partnerships between the private, public, associative and community sectors in order to translate solutions developed locally into larger scale implementation to provide universal access to drinking water and sanitation.

Submit proposal for a global consensus on international solidarity in order to make access to drinking water and sanitation an ongoing political and financial priority.



## The four main themes of the consultation

### 1. Access to water as a fundamental human right and responsibility

how should this fundamental right be defined? The right to water cannot imply the right to an unlimited quantity of water. The fundamental right to water should only apply to basic needs for drinking, agricultural and domestic use. Parameters for these basic needs have to be established.

how should the right to water translate into specific obligations? Governments must act as the guarantors and shoulder the responsibility for the financial, technical and institutional mechanisms required to satisfy the population's basic water needs. Legal measures must be defined to translate the right to water into duties and responsibilities at the various levels of management: users, local communities, private sector and public utilities in some cases. The various gender specific roles will be taken into consideration and the whole process will attempt to foster awareness of this issue.

which recourse and lobbying actions are available to ensure that this right is acknowledged and implemented? Discussions must deal with the political, legal and institutional measures required to ensure that this right is acknowledged and implemented for all population groups.

### 2. Sustainability parameters: in particular, the cost of water services

The cost of water for domestic use is made up of both infrastructure and service costs.

Should infrastructure costs be borne entirely or partly by populations who do not receive the service? Should mechanisms be established to foster national and international solidarity?

How can the user's willingness and ability to pay be built into the infrastructure, operation and maintenance costs? By using appropriate systems? By involving users in the choice of options and management systems, with special consideration for gender issues?

Should underprivileged populations enjoy guaranteed service and rates since water is a basic need? How can the costs involved in service delivery be fairly shared? How different are the roles of men and women and how can their interests and concerns be reconciled?



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### **3. Local and national water governance**

Water governance is frequently shared among a number of different players —politicians, administrators, associations and private entities— who often work in isolation. The need for users and citizens to play a significant role in water governance is gaining increased recognition.

If we accept the principle that water sustainability and security are based at the watershed and basin level, should water governance be defined in relation to watersheds and basins? How?

If water is to be shared democratically at these levels, is there a need to create new mechanisms for dialogue and regulation amongst the different users? How can we plan a sustainable development approach that will also include gender-sensitive mechanisms?

How can the government be more effective in its role as guarantor of the public interest and better monitor institutional agreements and arrangements?

### **4. International solidarity applied to water management**

The following principles underlay integrated water management at an international level: respect for the resource, sharing and solidarity. Water management must be integrated in a sustainable development framework with a cross-border approach and widely accepted land use principles. Moreover, cooperation between states sharing the resource is an absolute requirement.

How can the priority issue of universal access to drinking water and sanitation be addressed at an international level?

Does access to water and sanitation require the adoption of an international framework convention such as the conventions on climate change, biological diversity or combating desertification?

Which coordination, arbitration and control mechanisms should be considered?

How can we ensure that decisions made at an international level will remain relevant at a national level and be responsive to peoples' needs?



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## **THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF WATER WISDOM**

**The World Assembly of Water Wisdom** is a concept launched by the International Secretariat for Water as a follow-up to the activities that took place at the first House of the Citizen and of the Water (The Hague, March 2000).

In February 2002, a citizen petition initiated during Earth Dialogues reinforced this concept. The "World Appeal" is lobbying political leaders to initiate official negotiations in order to apply international solidarity to water management.

At the Water Dome in Johannesburg (August 2002) during the World Summit on Sustainable Development the process to formalise The World Assembly of Water Wisdom was publicly and jointly announced by the International Secretariat for Water, Green Cross International and Alliance Maghreb-Machrek pour l'Eau with representatives of the City of Lyon in attendance.

### **Mandate**

To discuss and validate the "Kyoto peoples declaration".

This declaration is the result of a bottom up general consultation focusing on four main themes (See Annex 2). It will include a statement of principles and means for their implementation. The declaration will be the foundation for a consensus aiming at international solidarity in water management with its rules and mechanisms with the ultimate goal of ensuring access to water and sanitation for all.

### **Legitimacy**

The members of The World Assembly of Water Wisdom will act in their personal capacity - as dedicated citizens - and not as representatives of a group or institution. The following criteria will apply to their selection:

To be convinced that water must be managed with an integrated approach that takes into account territorial, geo-morphological and climatic factors and relies on traditions knowledge and cultures of local populations.

To be involved in water management, more specifically in activities focusing on providing access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for all.

To be willing to participate in the bottom up consultation process and act as a multiplier and disseminator

To attend both the preparatory session and The World Assembly of Water Wisdom , in Kyoto, in March 2003

To have sufficient knowledge of one of the three conference languages (French, English, Spanish) to be able to understand and communicate.



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## Membership

The World Assembly of Water Wisdom will be composed of delegates from all parts of the world, all age groups, with diversified experience and equal gender representation. The 50 to 70 members will include elected officials, civil society stakeholders (NGOs, trade unions, consumer groups), commercial service providers, opinion leaders (scientists, journalists, artists, etc.), financiers, representatives of local, national and international governments, public and para-public sector service providers and youth.

## Timetable

	2002								2003											
Tasks	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
(1)																				
(2)																				
(3)																				
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## Description of Activities Timeline

1. Information dissemination and network mobilization
2. Official presentation of the process at the Johannesburg Summit, August-September 2002
3. Information and expertise exchange and interactivity  
Selection of participants who will sit on The World Assembly of Water Wisdom
4. Synthesis of collected data
5. Preparation of The World Assembly of Water Wisdom
6. Preparatory session and World Assembly in Kyoto, March 2003
7. Follow-up of the declaration

*Printed on September 27 2002*  
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Version 3, September 2002



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## Four sets of activities in support of the process

**The first set of activities** involves the launching of Web-based debates: in French on the Agora 21 website at [www.agora21.org](http://www.agora21.org) and in English, a virtual water forum at <http://www.worldwaterforum.org/>

**The second set of activities** consists of expertise and information exchange amongst existing networks, some whose members will sit on The World Assembly of Water Wisdom in Kyoto. These networks have already assigned contact-staff and many are already actively involved in the process.

Participants to the Assembly	Networks involved to date
Youth	- Youth World Water Forum (YWWF) - World Youth Parliament for Water in Quebec ISW UNICEF UNESCO-World Water Assessment Program
Opinion leaders	- Panapress - International Federation of Environmental Journalists de (IFEJ)
Municipal and regional elected officials	- Council of Europe (EU) - Parliamentarian for Global Action (USA) - International Union of Local Authorities (IULA)
Financers / private sector	- Camdessus Comity
Scientists	- International Network of Basin Organisations (INBO) - Centre Régional pour l'Eau et l'Assainissement à faible coût (CREPA) - Global Water Partnership (GWP) - World Water Council (WWC) - UNESCO-IHP
Civil society stakeholders	- Asian Alliance of Appropriate Technology Practitioners (Approtech Asia) - Réseau Africain de Développement Intégré (RADI), - Red de Estudios de los Servicios Urbanos en América Latina (REDES), - Earth Forever Bulgaria

**The first and second sets of activities** will focus on the following main themes (see Annex 1 for details):

- Access to water as a fundamental human right and responsibility.
- Sustainability parameters: in particular, the cost of water services.
- Local and national water governance.
- International solidarity applied to water management

**The third set of activities** will consist of 6 case studies. They will demonstrate the practical operation of rules and mechanisms promoting international solidarity in water management. These cases will be incorporated in the programme of the House of the Citizen and of the Water.

The case studies will involve the Niger, the Mekong, the Rhine, the Great Lakes and St-Lawrence River as well as the Dniepr. The last case study from South America remains to be finalized.

**Finally, the fourth set of activities** will include:

- Synthesis preparation for Kyoto
- Presence at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto (case studies presentation, organising The World Assembly of Water Wisdom, etc.)
- Production of post-Kyoto promotion material.