

From Mexico to Istanbul: 2006-2009

consolidating the international movement in defense of water

In March 2006 in Mexico City, hundreds of organizations from 30 countries from throughout the world gathered at the International Forum in Defense of Water held parallel and alternatively to the IV World Forum on Water. At the International Forum, we the organizations present signed a declaration in which we committed to promote a World Plan of Action to strengthen our local struggles, advance the creation of regional networks, and link ourselves within a global platform in defense of water.

Three years have passed since that commitment. Now, in March 2009, the **Coalition of Mexican Organizations for the Right to Water** (*Coalición de Organizaciones Mexicanas por el Derecho al Agua – COMDA*) salutes the efforts of the social, civil, professional, union, rural, and popular organizations, and the citizens of Turkey, men and women in general, to assure that the international movement in defense of water have a favorable scenario through which to make its voice heard and take a firm step forward in its consolidation.

We hereby ratify our commitment to struggle for the principles that are the framework of our national and international unity:

- **Water is a human right.** This is a basic principle and continues to be an important axis of struggle and mobilization at the world level. General Comment 15 on the right to water issued by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in relation to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the statement by the United Nations Committee on Human Rights regarding a new mandate for the “independent expert on human rights obligations in matters of access to drinking water and sanitation,” are important advancements, but remain insufficient. Some countries have recognized this right in their national legislations, but many others have not. In the World Water Forums themselves, the representatives of the large transnational companies and more than a few of the governments participating in this space resist the express recognition of this right, which would imply an obstacle to their vision of water as merchandise and to the profitable business they do

with it. We therefore salute the initiative of the government of Uruguay to promote the signature of a declaration that specifically includes the recognition of water as a human right. We commit ourselves to maintain this principle and we report that in Mexico, COMDA has undertaken a campaign called “The Right to Water in the Constitution” with the objective to consolidate the right to water at the Constitutional level.

- **Public management of water and NO to privatization.** It is the obligation of the governments and public institutions to look out for the wellbeing of the majorities and to provide clean water and sanitation services for the entire population within criteria of equity and social justice. We are opposed to privatization, given that our own experiences and those in other countries have shown that private company investments –in particular those by the large transnational companies– not only do not resolve problems of insufficient supply, distribution and maintenance, but also create others including high tariffs and greater inequalities in the management of the services. In Mexico, the cities which have opted for privatization (such as Aguascalientes) have water tariffs as much as ten times higher than other cities in which the services remain under public control. Furthermore, the private businesspeople have no interest in providing the resource to the communities and peoples who lack services, considering that such investments do not produce the profits to which they aspire. Public management requires mechanisms of social oversight and accountability, and it is necessary to advance toward forms of water policy planning that foment social and citizen participation. We declare ourselves in favor of strengthening democratic public management experiences, promoting community intervention and gender equity, and demanding respect for the territories and collective management of the water of indigenous and native peoples.
- **Environmental sustainability and preservation of the water cycle.** In recent years, the environmental problems associated with water have acquired a character of urgency. Floods, droughts, pollution of water bodies, deforestation, the loss of multiple species, fre-

quent powerful hurricanes, and multiple effects of climate change are felt around the world throughout the year, resulting in the loss of forms of existence, human heritage, and even of human lives. The natural phenomena themselves are not what produce disasters but rather a development scheme based on uncompromising urbanization, construction of massive works, degradation of ecosystems, drastic forced modifications of water courses, etc., all of which derive into social disasters. In these past three years, Mexico has suffered an unprecedented flood in the state of Tabasco, several hurricanes striking the southeastern region of the country, and the permanent threat of drought in the northern states of the country. We maintain our demand for a holistic management of water, in adherence to clearly defined environmental criteria. And we reiterate our call to look at the community and local experiences that illustrate viable technological, social and financial alternatives to achieve sustainability in water management.

- **Multilateral, democratic, and inclusive governance of water.** We pronounce against the V World Forum of Water and we demand that our government and all the governments of the world abstain from participating in this event. We pronounce in favor of the United Nations entities being those with the authority to convoke participation in the world meetings and not the business representatives. We emphasize that the conclusions and declarations that emerge from the V Forum do not represent the governments or the social and civil organizations of Mexico or the world. We denounce the fact that the Mexican Government did not convoke any public meeting on the matter and has not released its position regarding this Forum in any formal manner. We join our efforts with the alternative expressions and events and we manifest our solidarity with the struggles of the Turkish social and civil organizations that share the framework of the principles we have noted.

The Coalition of Mexican Organizations for the Right to Water – COMDA – is firmly convinced that no international movement exists without local struggles. We therefore report that in our country we maintain ongoing struggle around the following points:

- The right to water in the Constitution. We maintain our struggle to raise the human right to water to Constitutional status.
- A stop to mega-projects. We demand the cancellation of mega-projects involving the construction of dams that affect the territory, resources and rights of peoples and communities, in particular the projects of La Parota in the state of Guerrero, Arcediano and Zapotillo in the state of Jalisco, and Paso de la Reina in the state of Oaxaca.
- Integral recovery of the country's rivers and water bodies. We denounce the fact that only 15% of residual industrial waters are treated and only 27% of municipal residual waters in the cities receive any type of treatment in Mexico. We demand the integral sanitary cleaning of the Santiago river and attention to the public health of the populations of El Salto and Juana-catlán in the state of Jalisco.
- Respect for the rights of women and of the indigenous peoples. We issue a call for the formulation of policies and projects that foment gender equity, and respect for the rights of women and of indigenous peoples, in particular the Council of Peoples of Morelos, the Mazahua Movement in the state of Mexico, and Citizens United for the Rescue of the Acuitlapilco Lagoon in Tlaxcala. We also demand control over the private real estate interests that promote large housing projects with no human rights and environmental sustainability perspective.

COMDA joins forces with the Global Action Week and undertakes a Day in Defense of Water on 19 March 2009 in Mexico City, within the framework of which it will present its most recent publication titled: *"Agua para todas y todos. Carpeta de experiencias y luchas por el Agua en México"* ("Water for all women and men. A file of experiences and struggles for water in Mexico").

From this space, we will accompany all the organizations gathered in Istanbul. We send our wishes for the optimal development of their work and we commit ourselves to fulfill the agreements and actions that emerge from the discussion and consensus of the international movement in defense of water.

In fraternity: Coalición de Organizaciones Mexicanas por el Derecho al Agua



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