



A NEW GLASNOST FOR OUR FUTURE:

The Right to Water and Dignified Life

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Exactly four years ago, in September 2000, the leaders of all the world's countries declared that:

"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected." UN Millennium Declaration

Nothing is more dehumanising than living without water and sanitation: so why are more efforts not being made to address the world water crisis? In the last four years, over 20 million children have died from preventable water-borne diseases, and hundreds of millions of people continue to live with the daily drudgery and squalor associated with the lack of water and sanitation. Yet, today, there is little to indicate that we will not face the same situation four years from now.

We are not living up to our commitments; we are not rising to the challenge. In short - we are sparing ourselves the effort.

I am here today to declare that ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! Enough broken promises, enough lame excuses.

The people of the world need to wake up, take responsibility, and play their part in the great human mission enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals. People in cities and towns, so often the drivers of change, innovation and solidarity, are absolutely central to this mission. Governments – including local governments – must lead by example.

THREE MAIN CHALLENGES

Forum Barcelona 2004 has been a wonderful contribution to the mobilization of the cultural forces of the world. We need to act together to build a new world order through a common effort based on shared human values, on strong ethics. No group or superpower can solve the current challenges on its own. Together, we must reject violence and promote dialogue. As His Holiness the Pope has said: "we need a new world order that should be more stable, more just and more humane". Of course it will take a lot of work – a huge global effort - to build such a world order, but as the goals are consistent with the hopes of the people - peace, justice and well-being for all – and with the human values of dignity, respect, equity, solidarity, responsibility, we can succeed.

Green Cross has been fully committed to this summer of culture and peace in Barcelona. On February 5-6, 2004, Green Cross hosted the *Earth Dialogues Barcelona* in collaboration with the city of

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Barcelona, as an official launch event for the Universal Forum of Cultures. Sharing the central goals of the Forum, the *Earth Dialogues Barcelona* addressed the challenge of forging a new global agenda for peace and security that is grounded in the ethical values of sustainability and diversity.

Between May 31 and June 3, Green Cross with the Barcelona Forum co-organised two Dialogues, the first on Water for Life and Security and the second on Energy and new Challenges. We are proud to have contributed to a better understanding of the three interrelated challenges: sustainable development, cultural diversity, and conditions for peace.

Increasing tensions on the world scene, escalating terrorism, religious intolerance, relentless environmental degradation, and the systematic violation of human rights all demonstrate now more than ever the need to understand the diverse roots of conflicts, as well as the links between peace and security, poverty, and environmental deterioration.

Today, no human being, whatever their religion and wherever they live in the world, can ignore the three challenges that the new century has thrown at our feet.

The first of these challenges, is the necessity to maintain world peace, to ensure that the international community is working to end local conflicts, preventing them from spreading over the globe like blood stains. We must work peacefully together to rid the planet of all weapons of mass destruction. The international community must also show itself to be similarly united in the fight against terrorism, which has no justification, either political or moral.

The second of these challenges concerns the worldwide fight against poverty. How can the lucky billion “haves” remain indifferent to the spectacle of misery presented by half the globe’s population, reduced to living off one or two dollars a day, suffering constantly from hunger, and often lacking clean drinking water and decent hygiene? How can we accept that in this age of Internet and globalization, millions of children should be forced to subsist by means of hard labour, have no access to education and go to sleep hungry at night?

The third of these challenges addresses environmental problems. Today we have evidence of climatic changes that are affecting the entire world: the number of natural cataclysms – typhoons, hurricanes, floods, droughts, high temperatures in temperate countries – is continuously rising. Large numbers of both plant and animal species are endangered, the polar icecaps are steadily melting, the oceans are increasingly polluted, primary forests continue to be destroyed at an alarming speed. We have reached a state of war with our own habitat, Nature, our Earth.

These three challenges facing humanity are interdependent. If we fail to construct world unity, end wars, and overcome the many bitter conflicts which divide us, then we will also fail to bring all nations together to co-operate in other areas, and notably in achieving a united approach to saving the Earth.

If we do not overcome poverty, if we do not manage to bridge the gap between rich and poor, educated and illiterate, we will never defeat the growing fanaticism, criminality and drug addiction problems of today. Cultural tolerance and solidarity are paramount, and unfortunately are being eroded in many parts of the world today.

The links between cultural and biological diversity have long been established: where nature flourishes so does human society in all its variety. War and conflict are the most brutal destroyers of both humankind and nature, capable of halting all progress towards harmony between communities and their natural environment and leaving behind a wasteland of recrimination and bitterness. Peace and tolerance are essential ingredients not only for our own well-being but to secure the sustainable future of our planet. Perhaps this explains why movements to declare the human right to peace are coinciding with those calling for the right to live in a healthy environment.

It is shocking to learn that American GDP grew 2.4% in 2003 thanks to military expenses related to the Iraq war. Without the war the growth would have been just 0.7%. When insecurity grows in a country, the expenditure on individual and national security increase the GDP, but the feeling of insecurity also increases the unhappiness of people. The remediation of degraded environment increases the GDP, but the loss of biodiversity is forever.

If we do not fight against poverty, any ecological advances made will be in vain. How does one forbid an indigenous farmer in the Amazon basin to clear some jungle in order to farm the land? How can one demand of a poor country that it take expensive measures to create ecologically sound companies?

However, if we do nothing about the environment, all our efforts to build a fairer world will be destined to fail, and future generations for the next hundreds of years will be paying for our senseless and destructive attitude towards nature. Life on Earth itself is threatened with extinction, as if it were nothing more than some fleeting moment in the history of the Universe.

These three challenges are not solely the concern of the national governments of different countries and international organizations: they concern local and regional governments, city authorities and each and every one of us, concerned citizens.

The time has come for each inhabitant of the Earth to make a personal contribution to the common task.

THE PATH FORWARD

How then does the world move forward to respond to the critical global survival challenges of the new millennium?

We have a clear choice. We can continue to pursue the path of consumerism, squandering the limited resources of the planet in the name of personal material accumulation and comfort, or we can honestly embrace sustainable development. The consumerism which has characterised the development of economies over the past 50 years is horrendously wasteful and irresponsible; its continuation will bring an ever greater divide between rich and poor and impose an unbearable burden on the earth's resources.

Consumerism is not an option for anyone: it is directly at odds with the movement towards sustainable development, and defies our very human values of equality and respect for our home, the Earth.

Most of the children born in the 21st century will grow up in cities, with their perceptions and behaviour shaped by an urban environment. The innate environmental sensitivity of people raised in rural areas is being lost. Unless the model of consumerism is replaced by the model of sustainable development, the problems caused by urbanisation and globalisation will become even more severe. We must all work to build sustainable urban lifestyles that respect nature, make space for all members of society and are less wasteful.

There is no question that redressing the poverty challenge means that the international community must get serious about international cooperation, fulfilling international development assistance commitments and ensuring that these resources reach the poorest of the poor.

At the 1992 Earth Summit, the international community agreed to a new pact, a common strategic plan for sustainable development. But implementation remains problematic because of the systematic depletion of political will over the last 12 years. Instead, governments of industrialized countries have consistently promoted the principles of economic liberalism over the goals of sustainable development in the policy-making sphere.

The *Road Map for achieving a real step towards sustainability* is summarized in the eight Millennium Development Goals and reaffirmed by the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability - including halving by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation - and develop a global partnership for development.

Thus we have already agreed to a road map for the survival of humankind. No one ever said it would be easy to achieve, and perhaps the hardest part is convincing people to care enough – about strangers living far away, or even future generations – to make it happen.

A NEW GLOBAL GLASNOST

The antiglobalization movement is right when they say that a different world is possible. However, for me the answer is not an end to globalization, but for it to focus on people, not profit, and be responsible towards the future of our planet.

Twenty years ago, when Glasnost launched the process of Perestroika that transformed the former Soviet Union, I was motivated by the need to awaken the people, to encourage them to become truly active and to recognise the importance of ensuring that each individual must be empowered to take decisions for themselves and join forces for the common cause.

Alongside increased individual responsibility and awareness, Glasnost leads to greater accountability and public scrutiny of governments. People must know what is happening and hold their representatives to task and insist on fulfilment of their commitments. An indispensable partner in building an informed and engaged citizenry is the media. The mass media in particular is extremely powerful in our information age, but needs to be used much more effectively to bring us not only the daily sensations but also a focus on the underlying fundamental challenges of poverty, environmental threats and access to essential services like water, energy and education.

As a contribution to this new Glasnost, Green Cross has launched an international magazine – *The Optimist* - to provide decision-makers and opinion leaders with a fresh perspective on how to address the serious socio-economic conflicts and environmental threats that we face today. The magazine seeks to foster transparency, understanding and the resolution of conflicts between different interest groups in order to open up new avenues for partnership and innovation.

A new Global Glasnost is what we urgently need for the sake of our future.

A GLOBAL TREATY ON THE RIGHT TO WATER

Those without access to water are by definition the poorest and most deprived people on earth. They are often without a voice, and without a means of asserting their rights. We must give them a voice, give them their humanity and honour our Millennium promises to them.

Meeting the water goals would be a shining example of how it is possible to make a difference – to make things better for everyone, and for the environment, by changing our values, re-evaluating priorities and living up to our commitments as a human family. The alternative – that in 2020, half the countries of the world live in severe water stress, and one third of the world's population is without water and sanitation – is too awful to even contemplate.

We must aim for universal access to water and sanitation – anything less is a violation of our civilisation, our universal human rights, our nature.

I would like to ask you to imagine a scenario: What would happen if one morning the people of the “rich world” – the US, Russia, Japan, Germany, Turkey, France, the UK, Italy, Spain, Poland, Canada, Australia, The Netherlands, Greece, the Czech Republic, Portugal, Hungary, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Slovakia, Denmark, Finland, Norway, New Zealand, Ireland, and Luxembourg - all woke up to discover that they had no running water?

What would happen?

- Bottled water and other drinks in the stores would sell out within hours.
- People would be forced to walk for miles to rivers or lakes.
- People would get sick because the water wasn't clean enough to drink.
- Because everyone would be flocking to the water sources, the roads would be blocked - so driving wouldn't be an option.
- People would have to carry heavy jugs and not just this one day, but every day until the water supply was restored.
- This could take up to 8 hours a day, so people could not go to their normal jobs.
- Without running water, no one's toilets would work anymore, and without water the sewage treatment plants would stop working.
- Imagine the smell
- Imagine what it would feel like to be thirsty, to watch your children go thirsty, and perhaps even to get sick or die as a result of dehydration or contamination.
- Imagine the newspaper headlines
- Imagine the demonstrations in the streets; imagine the riots, the looting
- Imagine the demands on government to restore the water supply.

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Government officials and experts would make it their number one priority and work around the clock to restore the service and deal with the associated problems – they would spare no effort.

The combined population of the countries in this unthinkable scenario is about 1.1 billion. But today 1.2 billion people in the world live this unthinkable scenario every day with no access to safe drinking water. And 2.4 billion people are without access to sanitation.

According to reliable estimations it will cost 20\$ per year per person during 10 years to resolve the water crisis. Somehow we have been unable to find the funds to bring water to the world's poor and suffering, but it was easy to raise \$70 billion in a fortnight in order to fight a war! This is a scandal.

WATER IS NOT A PRIVILEGE, IT IS A RIGHT!

We should be working with the same sense of urgency that we would have if it was our own taps that were running dry, our own children going thirsty. That is what solidarity means.

Every person on earth should have access to basic essential services including energy, water, sanitation, education, health and, in today's world, means of communication.

Providing these basic services often falls under the responsibility and domain of competence of local and regional governments. Without rules and regulations formulated and guaranteed by national governments and supported by international solidarity and partnership, it is impossible for many local governments in developing countries and especially in large cities to provide these basic services to everyone.

Supporting the ongoing work of institutions like UN HABITAT, which are promoting the adoption of a universal declaration on access to essential services, Green Cross and its partners believe that an urgent effort must be made regarding water supply and sanitation.

A Global Treaty on the Right to Water could give all people a tool through which to assert their human right to safe water and sanitation. The rights-based approach to management of water resources will open the road to access to water for all.

Green Cross and its partners are proposing the negotiation and adoption of a Global Treaty on the Right to Water. The fundamental principles of this Treaty have been discussed over the past three years, and agreed to in June during the Water for Life Dialogue here in Barcelona.

And now with other international, national, regional and local organizations we are launching an international public campaign in order to convince national governments to start the negotiation of this Treaty. Citizens around the world will be encouraged to sign a global petition and become actively involved. Our target is to present the world with a petition of at least 10 million signatures at the MDG+5 Review in 2005.

M. Mohamed Elyazghi, the Minister of Territorial Management, Water and Environment of Morocco, who came to Barcelona in June, represents the first government supporting the Treaty Initiative. We hope that many other governments, national and local, will soon be joining this essential movement for the survival of Humankind.

I encourage and invite all of you to become Ambassadors for this global citizens initiative in your countries, your communities, your organizations.