

March 8, 2007

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

I am writing on behalf of CUPE's 560,000 members, on International Women's Day, to call for government action making access to water a right for everyone. Our union joins affiliates of the 20-million member Public Services International today in highlighting water as a women's issue and pressing governments to accept their responsibility to provide quality water services to all.

Upholding the right to water and providing developing world governments with the resources to fulfill this right will help lift millions in the global South out of poverty, in particular women and children.

Women and girls are most deeply affected by the lack of access to water, which is a fundamental human right. In South Africa, for example, women and girls collectively spend 40 million hours per year fetching water – time not spent on education or paid work.

Canada has a direct role to play in increasing access to safe, affordable water for everyone in the global South. Our country must provide more development assistance, including committing to a plan to raise our aid contribution to 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income. Canada must also provide better aid that focuses on reducing poverty, promoting human rights and building vital public services like drinking water and sanitation systems.

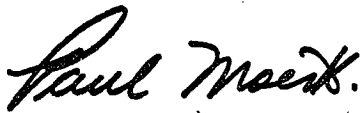
In addition, Canada must stop using development funds to promote privatization of public services, including through the World Bank's Public Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility. International financial institutions including the World Bank are acknowledging that privatization has failed in the global South. Governments around the world must get serious about meeting the Millennium Goals for Development through public investment in services controlled by communities – not corporations.

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At home, your government's promotion of infrastructure privatization through public private partnerships poses a threat to safe, affordable drinking and wastewater systems. And there is a need for immediate action to assure safe drinking water and sewage treatment for First Nations communities, many of which are suffering from generations of neglect. The state of services on many reserves is a national disgrace, a scandal made worse by the growing size of the federal surplus. These issues must be dealt with as part of the development of a national water policy that protects our water supply and promotes public services.

Finally, I call on you to reverse Canada's opposition at the United Nations to the right to water. Our country has drawn international criticism for not recognizing this fundamental right. It is time to show leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul Moist".

PAUL MOIST  
National President  
Canadian Union of Public Employees

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