

March 21, 2007

## World Water Day 2007: Public water is a right

On March 22, water activists around the world celebrate their victories and renew their struggle to ensure public water services for all. CUPE is proud to be part of the movement for public water in Canada and around the world.

Delegates to CUPE's 1997 national convention identified water privatization as our next big fight. And we were right. In the decade since, CUPE has been on the front line of the fight against privatization of water and wastewater services. We have won significant victories, and we have learned important lessons that sharpen our strategy for the struggles ahead.

This year, we join national and international allies in the call to recognize safe, accessible public water services as a fundamental right. This right is under intense and growing pressure. Privatization, underfunding, pollution, and the call to treat water as a tradable commodity are significant roadblocks to building and strengthening public water services.

In Canada, federal funding for community infrastructure - including water - hasn't kept pace with the growing needs in our cities and towns. Corporations are preying on this shortfall, pushing privatization through public private partnerships on municipalities and First Nations communities.

The federal government has joined several provinces in forcing P3s on communities by attaching strings to much-needed public funding. This strong-arm tactic diminishes local democracy and robs communities of their right to decide how services should be delivered. Privatizing water could also trigger international trade rules giving corporations powers that trump government rights to regulate in the public interest.

Yet despite the corporate hard sell, the vast majority of Canada's water and wastewater systems remain publicly owned and operated - many by CUPE members. This is a direct result of the grassroots work of CUPE members, in coalition with the Council of Canadians, KAIROS and other environmental and social justice groups.

Under the banner of Water Watch, CUPE will continue to oppose water privatization. From an east coast fight against a water P3 in Sackville, NB to a major campaign for public sewage treatment in Victoria, BC, CUPE is there.

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CUPE will continue to build and work with coalitions that have turned the tide against water privatization in many communities across Canada. We will also keep up the pressure for stable, long-term public infrastructure funding.

The federal government must also take 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.

Canada also has a critical role to play in ending the global water crisis. CUPE calls on Prime Minister Stephen Harper 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.

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. CUPE has joined forces with Oxfam Canada in a campaign highlighting public services as key to ending global poverty and promoting women's rights.

Canada can help increase access to safe, affordable water for everyone in the global South. Through our work with Oxfam, we are calling on Canada to deliver a plan raising our aid contribution to 0.7 per cent of Canada's income, and ensure our aid focuses on reducing poverty, promoting human rights and building public services like drinking water and sanitation systems.

CUPE also joins affiliates of Public Services International in highlighting water as a women's issue and pressing governments to accept their responsibility to provide quality water services to all. Women and girls are most deeply affected by the lack of access to water.

There is much to do on many fronts. But together, we are strong.

Today, we raise a glass of public water to toast our victories over the last decade. When the privateers identify CUPE as their biggest obstacle, we know we're doing something right! We also recognize the challenges ahead, and commit our union to continue building a public water movement that's smart, strategic and successful. We call on all our members to join this struggle. Find out how you can get involved by visiting [cupe.ca/water](http://cupe.ca/water)

In solidarity,



PAUL MOIST  
National President



CLAUDE GÉNÉREUX  
National Secretary-Treasurer