



Final Statement of the Workshop on The Human Right to Water



In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis presents the main issues related to the human right to water, including the lack of access to drinking water, sanitation, and continued inequality of quality and availability of resources. The encyclical also refers to the repercussions of droughts and floods on food production, the prevalence of pollution-related diseases and warns us against a "green economy" that is often green not because it is ecological, but because it treats nature as a commodity.

The socio-environmental crisis that we face arises from environmentally irresponsible human action that has resulted in spreading socio-environmental injustice, increasing inequality and poverty, and a lack of adequate food supply. Throughout the world, the lack of access to safe water and the pollution of water sources seriously and increasingly affects quality of life, particularly women, the poorest, and the most vulnerable. In addition, thousands of people put their lives at risk by demanding the right to water or by actively defending natural resources.

Production models focused on fossil fuels are directly responsible for global warming. Climate change, like water scarcity, is a consequence of human action. The degradation of the environment has increased exponentially and today the world faces the consequences of economic models of production that "privatise the profits and socialise the losses". In regions such as the Amazon, deforestation and pollution of water sources have accelerated in recent decades as a result of the development of mining, production and developing infrastructure, leading to potential conflicts varying in nature and scale.

Many cultures, societies and religions of the world recognise water as a spiritual and material principle of life, thus finding common ground. They also recognise that everything in the universe is connected and that the care for the common good requires solutions based on cooperation, solidarity and a culture of dialogue. On this basis, new paradigms must be built in which humanity does not claim unlimited and disrespectful dominion over nature, but rather exercises a collective responsibility.

Those most affected by the scarcity of water and a lack of basic sanitation must be involved in the developments towards universal access. Everyone is called to participate actively in caring for our common home, each with their own experiences, initiatives and capabilities. Households, neighbourhoods, cities, regions and countries, with small and large responses and actions, are called to guarantee universal access to safe water and sanitation, and to exercise the responsibility to our fellow human beings and to the generations to come.

Ensuring the human right to safe water is essential for the exercise of other rights such as food, health and welfare. Human rights provide a normative basis and constitute a source of authority and legitimacy for realising universal and fair access to this resource. The inclusion of the right to clean water and sanitation in international agreements, instruments and declarations is indispensable for the development of human life. For this reason, the recognition of access to clean water and sanitation as a fundamental human right is indisputable.

Although the challenge is great, we rely on solidarity and collective sensitivity, fruits of the dialogue of philosophies, knowledge, spiritualities and epistemologies. There are currently many valuable projects and initiatives working towards the care of our common home and we have a better understanding of the problem, not primarily as an issue of scarcity but as an inadequate management of the resource. Today we know that the use of fossil fuels in energy generation contributes to climate change but we have inherited a significant body of scientific knowledge, as well as clean energy technologies that can help mitigate global warming. Today, we know what we have to do: develop another paradigm of development, centred on the care of our common home, centred on solidarity, equality and justice in the use and management of water.

Many of today's economic and production systems, ways of life, and consumption behaviours cause environmental degradation. We need an education that fosters a cultural change around the recognition of the other and the defence of water and ecosystems; we urge a cultural change in which science and technology can make fundamental contributions to the preservation of water and its universal use. More effective legal tools are needed to protect common assets and a human rights perspective can ensure that water supply and sanitation do not fall under the influence of powerful groups, but are safeguarded by binding legal obligation.

We need governments that have the will and political force to generate the necessary changes, following the moral imperative of the Sustainable Development Goals approved after Pope Francis' address to the United Nations, in particular points 6 and 14. This requires a collective commitment to the creation of global, state and local public policies that incorporate real and effective participation in the full exercise of citizenship and the concern for the common good. Today it is urgent to reach a consensus on models of governance that allow for the formation of an authentic culture of water. Governments must also ensure the safety and lives of all those who work for the right to water and the preservation of nature.

The recognition of rights must be met by a universal responsibility for action. This implies changes in lifestyle, production and consumption, as well as the development of renewable and clean energy. The provision of safe water in necessary quantities and the collection of wastewater and its disposal by environmentally adequate means, contribute to the care of our common home and people's dignity, whilst also contributing to the development of responsible citizenship amongst present and future generations.

Each of us, scientists, entrepreneurs, politicians, labourers for humanity, must be aware that the threat of climate change demands concrete and urgent measures. In the encyclical, Pope Francis proposes the development of an integral ecology for the care of our common home, inviting a collective and joint mobilisation for the defence of universal access to safe water by governments, institutions, the private sector, workers and societies around the world. Uniting with a collaborative commitment and collective action is necessary to demonstrate the urgency of the change of the instrumental rationality towards a true intergenerational solidarity. We call for the implementation of an integral ecology, incorporating environmental, economic, social and cultural dimensions, for fostering a culture of encounter, which acknowledges the human right to water and sanitation. Science, culture, politics and technology all have a part to play in achieving societies of justice, solidarity and equality, committed to the care for our common home.

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