

A Fundamental Shift in Mindset – Water, from a Commercial Commodity to a Sacred Gift

An interreligious input to the “Wake Up Call on Water Cooperation”

As leaders, teachers and students of the world’s religious and spiritual traditions we make the following recommendations to the outcome document of the ‘Wings for Water’ Multi Stakeholder Dialogue on Water that held on March 21 in the Peace Palace in The Hague¹.

We endorse the commitments and recommendations of the interreligious statement “*Towards Rio + 20 and Beyond – A Turning Point in Earth History*” drafted by the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values that has been endorsed by over 200 spiritual leaders from diverse traditions and are building on its legacy².

We embrace the spirit of the “Wake Up Call” and support its vision to create a water-secure world within the next few decades. We call on the world’s governments to show courageous leadership in consultation with the people to adopt a bold and ambitious international target to provide access to safe drinking water for all members of the human family. This requires their highest attention and political priority.

We suggest that the formulation of a new global target on water in the post 2015 development agenda should be based on the following widely shared ethical principles:

- Water is the cradle and source of all life on earth, it is a sacred gift. We need to recognize that regardless of its utilitarian or commercial worth, water has a social, cultural, medical, religious and spiritual value. It is also a profound symbol within our scriptural and liturgical traditions.
- We are appealing to all women, men and children to contemplate deeply about the sacred quality of water. This requires a fundamental change of mindsets of people. Water should not be treated as a commodity or seen merely as a means to serve vested interests.
- It is not just water, it is “Sister Water” (St. Francis) – a public good that is to be preserved and shared.
- This paradigm shift should translate into a change of behaviour – whenever we are using water, we should do so with moderation, awe, reverence and gratitude.
- The use of water provides a unique occasion to distinguish our needs from our wants. It should be the primary goal to provide the basic water needs for all people, especially the poor, vulnerable and excluded, and to preserve the vitality and integrity of the ecosystems on which we all depend. All other “wants” for water should be considered secondary.
- Any on-going or planned development projects that have an impact on local communities, including tribal and indigenous communities, must be based on the free, informed and prior consent of the affected communities. Projects must be stopped where this consent has not been obtained, and governments shall provide effective remedies and redress for incurred human rights abuses and environmental damage.
- It should become a priority in the Post 2015 Development Agenda to provide the necessary resources and scale-up the capacities of governments, especially in developing countries, to guarantee the fundamental and inalienable human right to water and sanitation for all people in all countries.

Recognising the wide coverage and influencing power bestowed on us, we commit to mobilize our congregations, communities and people of all faiths to support these goals, reduce their water footprints and to join the concerted international effort of creating a water-secure world.

We also commit to form an enduring global partnership for providing water and sanitation for all. We do not live in isolation; we draw strength from each other. “Living water” will be in reach of the whole community of life. This hope propels us to action.

¹ See www.wwd2013.org

² See www.soetendorpinstitute.org

Endorsed in individual capacity by:

Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, President and Founder, Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values

Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, Chief Imam of India, President, All India Imam Organization

Dinesh Suna, Coordinator, Ecumenical Water Network, World Council of Churches

Dr. Onno Ruding, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

Dr. Husna Ahmad OBE, Group CEO, Faith Regen Foundation

Pujya Swami Chitanand Saraswati, Founder, Ganga Action Parivar

Sadhvi Adityananda Saraswati, Coordinator, Ganga Action Parivar

Sadhvi Bhagavati Saraswati, Founder/President, Divine Shakti Foundation

Patrick Nickisch, United Religions Initiative Representative to the United Nations, Geneva

Pauline Tangiora, Maori Elder

Yeye Omileye Achikeobi-Lewis & Chief Derrick Lewis, Humanity4Water and Co-Founders, WaterSongLine

Mona Ann Polacca, International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers

For more information and for endorsing this statement online, please visit the website of the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values at www.soetendorpinstitute.org and contact Michael Slaby at msslaby@soetendorp.org