Who owns our water?

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Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family.*
The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

-- General Comment 15: Right to Water, 2002 adopted by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Water availability

- **Blue planet but less than 1% available for human consumption**
  - 1.7 billion people lack access to clean water
  - 2.3 billion people suffer from water-borne diseases each year

- **Loss of freshwater:**
  - Increase in population, climate change, urbanization, industrialization, deforestation, pollution, glaciers melting in seas, groundwater mining, virtual water, etc. etc.
Water, the next oil

“If the wars of the [21st] century were fought over oil, the wars of the next century will be fought over water”.

-Ismail Serageldin, former VP, World Bank, Newsweek, 1995

• Water privatization
  – Rationale
    • Corporations are more efficient, cost-effective unlike publicly managed water works
  – World Bank and World Trade Organization

Concerns about privatization

- **Goal:** Profit Making
- **Stockholders interests more important than consumers**

- Increase in cost of water
- Massive layoffs
- Increase in disconnections
- Poor cannot afford new water connections
- Increase in waterborne illnesses
- Poor maintenance
- Lack of transparency and non-democratic nature of agreement
- Cost-cutting to increase profits – weak regulations
Cochabamba, Bolivia: Water War

- 1999: Backed by World Bank, Bolivian Govt. signs 40 yr. contract with Bechtel Corporation
- Water rate hiked immediately
- Poor and small business hardest hit
- Civil disobedience—beginning of the first water wars
- Street protests
- Military took over the city
- 175 injured, 2 blinded and 1 dead
- April 2000, Bolivian government terminated the contract
Water a human right or a commodity?

- Basic need
- Water as ‘commons’
- Who should be responsible for ensuring the realization of water as a human right?
  - The Government – public trust
  - The public
- Market-based globalization beliefs must be substituted by those of cooperation, sustainability and public stewardship (Barlow, 2007)
References


• United Nations (1948). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html
Some steps we could take...

- Support the right to water for everyone
  [www.blueplanetproject.net](http://www.blueplanetproject.net)

- Support public control of water resources and increased funding for public drinking water—sign online petition at
  [www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/trust-fund](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/trust-fund)

- Calculate your water footprint
  [www.h2oconserve.org](http://www.h2oconserve.org)

- Do not drink bottled water
  [www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org](http://www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org)

- Conserve water inside and outside the house

- Do not pollute your watershed

- Reduce the use of virtual water, buy local (as much as possible)

- Protect groundwater from depletion
  [www.groundnwater.org](http://www.groundnwater.org)

- Spread the word
SLOWPOKE

INSPIRED BY THE PATENTING OF THE HUMAN GENOME, OTHER COMPANIES FOLLOW SUIT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD, I'M PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT WE'VE SUCCESSFULLY WON THE RIGHTS TO SNOW!

OR, AS IT WILL ALSO BE KNOWN, THE GLOBOPLUNDIMAXX FLAKE!

"WE'LL SUBLICENCE TO OTHER NATIONS, WHO CAN FORM A CARTEL TO KEEP PRICES HIGH!"

ON BEHALF OF ALL ZE SKI RESORTS IN ZE ALPS, PLEASE BRING ZE COST DOWN!

SNOPEC

YES, FREE FROM THE SHACKLES OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE, SNOW™ CAN FINALLY BEAR FRUIT IN THE MARKET, BENEFITING EVERYONE!

BUT OUR VALUE CREATION DOESN'T END THERE—WE'VE GOT A PATENT PENDING ON THE THIRD DIMENSION!

YOUR PLEADING ANNOYS ME. I RAISE THE PRICE TO $60 PER KILOGRAM!

JUST THINK OF THE ROYALTIES!