

# 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.*

# Essence of Life - Water

*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 [21<sup>st</sup>] century were fought over oil, the wars of the next century will be fought over water”.

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

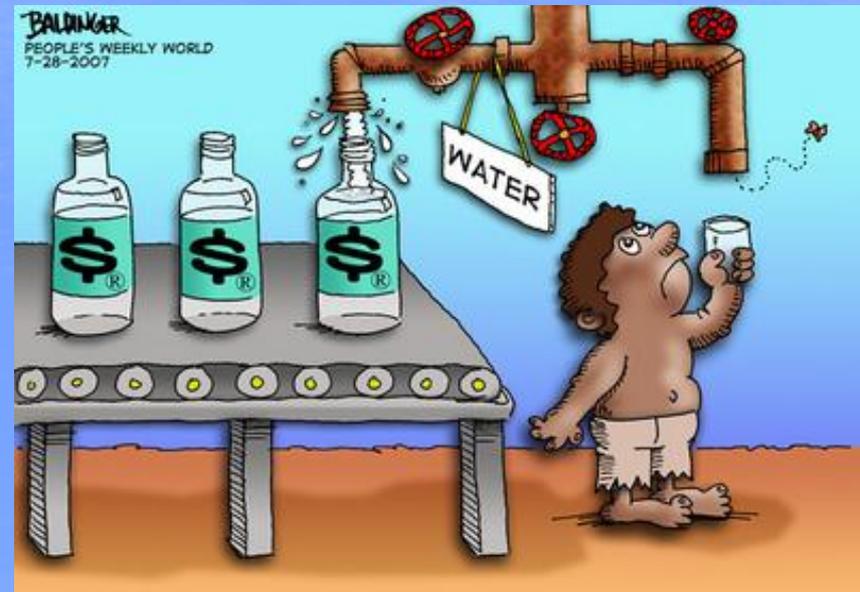
- **Water privatization**
  - Rationale
    - Corporations are more efficient, cost-effective unlike publicly managed water works
  - World Bank and World Trade Organization



<http://www.svdcuria.org/public/jpic/water/en.htm>

# 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

- Barlow, M., & Clarke, T. (2002). *Blue Gold: The fight to stop the corporate theft of the world's water*. New York, NY: The New Press
- Barlow, M. (2007). *The Blue Covenant. The global water crisis and the coming battle for the right to water*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Lohan, T. (2008). *Water Consciousness, San Francisco, CA: AlterNet Books*.
- Shiva, V. (2002). *Water wars: privatization, pollution and profit*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press
- 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.groundwater.org](http://www.groundwater.org)
- Spread the word

# SLOWPOKE

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