

**WOMEN'S CAUCUS DECLARATION:  
4<sup>th</sup> WORLD WATER FORUM, MEXICO CITY  
18 March 2006**

"The [United Nations General] Assembly also stressed the need to involve women in all water-related development efforts. In many cultures, including indigenous societies, women are the guardians of water. They are the ones who often spend long, arduous hours searching for and carrying water. They need to be able to participate more meaningfully in decision-making on how water is used and managed, so that their countries can make full use of their knowledge, skills and contributions." *UN Secretary-General Message on World Water Day, March 22, 2006*

### **Key issues**

Throughout history, women have been the stewards of the global commons: water, land, air, biodiversity, indigenous and traditional knowledge and institutions. Women protect, conserve and enhance the water resources and access within and across the contexts of household, community, culture and subsistence livelihood generation.

For some 30 years, international and UN global conferences have repeatedly recognized that effective sustainable water resources management depends on engaging women at all levels of decision-making and implementation, including:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women—CEDAW (1979): "To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply..." (Art. 14, h)
- Dublin Resolution of the Water for Life Decade (1992): "Women play a central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water and sanitation and must be involved in all water-related development efforts."
- Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002): "Mobilize international and domestic financial resources at all levels...for water and sanitation infrastructure and services development, ensuring that such infrastructure and services meet the needs of the poor, and are gender sensitive" (24a).
- 13<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development Outcome Document (2005): "Involving all stakeholders, including women, youth and local communities, in integrated planning and management of land and water resources" (para d, xi).

Further, the United Nations General Comment 15 to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states: "The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights" (2002).

However, women have often been denied their human right to water and are continually excluded from key decision-making roles, which have led to environmental destruction, deterioration of human health, and the feminization of poverty. Women recognize that the human right to water explicitly ensures that water is safe and acceptable, physically accessible, affordable, and in sufficient and adequate quantity.

### **Recommendations for Action**

- The human right to water must be implemented and enforced by all stakeholders at all levels.
- Governments must immediately implement their international commitments to women's rights and gender equity in relation to water and sanitation;
- Water services must not be included in World Trade Organization or other trade agreements, or through loan-conditionality programs by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and regional development banks.
- Governments must officially recognize purposeful contamination of water and exclusion of access to safe water is a crime against humanity;

- Governments must enforce “Polluter Pays Principles” as instituted in the Rio Declaration, whether due to neglect or mismanagement, as well as implement policies that ensure preventative protection of water sources.
- Governments must recognize sanitation as an integral part of the human right to water.
- All stakeholders must recognize that women’s empowerment is essential to poverty eradication and environmental regeneration. Women, therefore, must be leaders in the development, implementation, and monitoring of viable initiatives and solutions.
- Institutions dealing with water must acknowledge and respect women’s central role and rights in the protection and management of water; therefore, these institutions must develop and implement the appropriate gender equity policies with full participation and representation of women.
- Policies must include a natural ecosystems approach to water management and infrastructure design;
- Local governments, utilities and the public sector must use participatory, gender-balanced and gender-sensitive working methods in developing sustainable, equitable and affordable water and sanitation systems, and water treatment infrastructure. Women must be key actors in the decision-making and development, implementation and monitoring of these systems;
- Gender, age, race, ethnicity, and economic status must be incorporated in response and mitigation strategies and policies concerning the impacts of anthropogenic and naturally-occurring environmental disasters, and climate change;
- Governing bodies must acknowledge that successful implementation of WSSD and MDGs will require the development of cross-cutting, gender-sensitive indicators and capacity-building programs;
- Gender Responsive Budgeting Initiatives (GRBI) must be used in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) by all stakeholders to ensure their commitments on gender equality and equity, poverty eradication and sustainable development are met with the necessary resources.
- Funds and other resources must be allocated to civil society organizations, particularly women, recognizing that women are full partners, not a recipient target group, for water and sanitation initiatives;
- Governments must urgently implement their commitment to water and land rights, to ensure women’s access to land and land tenure, water, credit and other financial services, technical inputs, training and markets.