

**PRESENTS**



**OPENS IN NEW YORK AND SELECT CITIES - SEPTEMBER, 2008**

**Running Time:** 84 minutes

**Rating:** Unrated by MPAA

**World Premiere:** Sundance Film Festival 2008

**Press Materials:** [www.flowthefilm.com](http://www.flowthefilm.com)

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## - SYNOPSIS

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*Water is the very essence of life.  
It sustains every living being on this planet and without it, there would be nothing...*

FLOW - Irena Salina's award-winning documentary investigation into what experts label the most important political and environmental issue of the 21st Century - The World Water Crisis.

Salina builds a case against the growing privatization of the world's dwindling fresh water supply with an unflinching focus on politics, pollution, human rights, and the emergence of a domineering world water cartel.

Interviews with scientists and activists intelligently reveal the rapidly building crisis, at both the global and human scale, and the film introduces many of the governmental and corporate culprits behind the water grab, while begging the question 'CAN ANYONE REALLY OWN WATER?'

Beyond identifying the problem, FLOW also gives viewers a look at the people and institutions providing practical solutions to the water crisis and those developing new technologies, which are fast becoming blueprints for a successful global and economic turnaround.

## - FLOW FACT SHEET

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- Of the 6 billion people on earth, 1.1 billion do not have access to safe, clean drinking water ([www.charitywater.org](http://www.charitywater.org)).
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency currently does not regulate 51 known water contaminants ([www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org)).
- While the average American uses 150 gallons of water per day, those in developing countries cannot find five ([www.charitywater.org](http://www.charitywater.org)).
- The water and sanitation crisis claims more lives through disease than any war claims through guns (<http://www.water.org>).
- According to the National Resources Defense Council, in a scientific study in which more than 1,000 bottles of 103 brands of water were tested, about one-third of the bottles contained synthetic organic chemicals, bacteria, and arsenic (<http://www.nrdc.org/>).
- Water is a \$400 billion dollar global industry; the third largest behind electricity and oil. ~ *CBS News, FLOW.*
- There are estimates that from five hundred thousand to seven million people get sick per year from drinking tap water. ~ *Erik Olson, Deputy Staff Director of Barbara Boxer's Environmental and Public Works Committee (EPW), FLOW.*
- California's water supply is running out – it has about 20 years of water left in the state. ~ *Maude Barlow, author of Blue Covenant and co-author of Blue Gold, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, FLOW.*
- There are over 116,000 human-made chemicals that are finding their way into public water supply systems. ~ *William Marks, author of Water Voices from Around the World, FLOW.*
- In Bolivia nearly one out of every ten children will die before the age of five. Most of those deaths are related to illnesses that come from a lack of clean drinking water. ~ *Jim Schultz, founder of the Democracy Center in Bolivia, FLOW.*
- The cost per person per year for having 10 liters of safe drinking water every day is just \$2 USD.  
~ *Ashok Gadgil, Senior Staff Scientist in the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, FLOW.*

## - DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT – IRENA SALINA

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Five years ago as I watched Robert Kennedy, Jr. talking about certain American industries which were routinely polluting our rivers and waterways, I was shocked to hear that some of these free flowing contaminating agents often end up in the human body. This is what initially drew me to pay close attention to any news related to water. But it was an article in The Nation entitled "Who Owns Water" which focused on the daunting concept of water privatization in New Orleans, that started my long journey which eventually resulted in FLOW.

That article outlined what would have become the largest water privatization deal in U.S. It had all the elements of a classic battle – a big French water company and its U.S. subsidiary, a retired nurse going door-to-door with a petition to try and stop it for fear the poor were not going to be able to afford water, the mayor was involved, the sewage company – all elements of New Orleans society were involved in this story.

So I convinced a friend of mine, a cameraman, to go with me to New Orleans to cover the story. This was long before hurricane Katrina, but the day we arrived Hurricane Lily (my daughter's name!), also arrived. On the first day of shooting, I had never seen so much water falling from the sky and I thought this was an ironically appropriate way to start a film about water!

Upon returning to New York a few weeks later, I called my friend Steven Starr, and told him about my vision for a film about the global water crisis. The film would cover the crisis from several different aspects: the pollution and commercialization of water in the US, The access to water abroad for poor people, the human rights issues involved and the celebrated spiritual aspects of water.

Steven believed in the importance of the subject matter and came on board as a producer immediately. Shortly thereafter I was off to Japan for the first official shoot at The World Water Forum conference in Kyoto. The conference was attended by politicians, concerned citizens, scientists, bankers, and ecologists. It gave me the opportunity to started diagramming the many issues involved, as well as meeting a myriad of interesting people involved with issues regarding water.

FLOW took us too many countries including Africa, Bolivia, Canada, India, France and the USA. Right from the start it was very important for me to thread this story back and forth between the USA and different countries around the world. One of the things that became immediately apparent to me was that water is a truly unifying element. We all need it, we all want it and more than anything else in the world it is the one thing that connects us all. This universal concept became the heart of my film.

The film questions the very nature of water and our relation to it. It shows how local action can challenge giant corporations, and how the privatization of water has jeopardized the way of life for entire populations. It was inspiring to learn that the most effective way to implement change around water issues, both here in the USA and abroad, are individual, community based initiatives.

During the five years of filming, I met some incredible people who kept my passion for water security burning bright. We started out with a small crew, but it eventually ended up being just me and a camera due to budgetary constraints. This personal approach seemed to be the most effective way to capture the stories of these inspiring people.

One of the many lessons I learned and I hope people learn from FLOW is that we can't take water for granted anymore. The future of our children and all species on the planet depend on our awareness of this and the fact that positive actions as citizens really can make a difference.

We can no longer believe the fable that our government is making sure our environment and drinking water is protected.

Water equals life, and knowledge is the first step toward change.

## - FILM SUBJECT BIOS

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### **Peter Gleick**

Dr. Peter H. Gleick is co-founder and President of the Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security in Oakland, California. His research and writing address the critical connections between water and human health, the hydrologic impacts of climate change, sustainable water use, privatization and globalization, and international conflicts over water resources. Dr. Gleick is an internationally recognized water expert and was named a MacArthur Fellow in October 2003 for his work. In 2001, the British Broadcasting Corporation dubbed Gleick a "visionary on the environment". In 2006, Dr. Gleick was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences.

### **Maude Barlow**

Maude Barlow is the National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, Canada's largest public advocacy organization, and the founder of the Blue Planet Project, working internationally for the right to water. She serves on the boards of the International Forum on Globalization and Food and Water Watch and is a Councillor with the Hamburg-based World Future Council. Maude is the recipient of six honorary doctorates, the 2005/2006 Lannan Cultural Freedom Fellowship Award, and the 2005 Right Livelihood Award (known as the "Alternative Nobel") for her global water justice work. She is also the best selling author or co-author of 16 books, including Blue Gold, The fight to Stop Corporate Theft of the World's Water and Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water, to be released in February 2008.

### **Dr. Ashok Gadgil**

Dr. Gadgil is a Senior Staff Scientist in the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and teaches at UC Berkeley. His research has focused on solar energy, energy efficiency and indoor air pollution. In mid 1990s Dr. Gadgil invented an affordable, effective and robust water disinfectant, which is also fail-safe, low-maintenance, energy-efficient and easy to operate. In this invention UV-light effectively destroys the DNA of pathogenic micro-organisms in water, such as bacteria, viruses and protozoan cysts that cause cholera, typhoid, polio, diarrhea and dysentery. WaterHealth International has implemented the invention on a turn-key basis in several countries. Based on this invention, more than 500,000 rural Indians now obtain their drinking water after it is triple-filtered, carbon-treated and disinfected, for 2/10th of a U.S. cent per liter. Dr. Gadgil is also developing affordable methods to remove arsenic from drinking water in Bangladesh, and leads a team to develop and implement a fuel-efficient stove (the "Berkeley-Darfur Stove") to improve the lives of the displaced people of Darfur. Dr. Gadgil is a recipient of several awards and honors.

### **Erik D. Olson**

Erik Olson, a senior attorney who joined NRDC, (National Resource Defense Council in 1991, was recently named its new director of advocacy. As one of the nation's top experts on drinking water safety, and as advocacy chief, his mission is to educate the public, politicians and business leaders on issues such as global warming, energy efficiency, to the safety of our food and water. Over the years Olson has steered a successful campaign to remove lead from school water fountains and tougher pesticide protection standards. He has spearheaded NRDC's work with the community of New Orleans and the environmental justice groups to ensure that the state and federal officials responded to the serious health threats brought on as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Before joining NRDC, Olson worked at the National Wildlife Federation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Olson is the author or co-author of more than a dozen studies on drinking water, pesticides and related issues.

**William E. Marks**

William E. Marks, author and speaker, is a renowned advocate of water. To experience America's waters, he undertook a two-year, 7000 miles horseback trek from San Diego to Maine, living outside full-time. He visited North Africa, Europe, Ireland, Canada, Mexico, and Australia to study historical water management. He also traveled the Negev Desert in Israel and the Petra region of Jordan to study irrigation projects from Biblical and Byzantine times. Marks is also founding publisher and of Martha's Vineyard Magazine & Nantucket Magazine. He founded Martha's Vineyard's first state-certified water testing lab and Vineyard Environmental Research, Institute. He is author of books, The History of Wind Power on Martha's Vineyard, and the widely acclaimed book the Holy Order of Water, Healing Earth's Waters and Ourselves and has a new book entitled, Water Voices from Around The World. Marks is a recipient of several awards, including the Citizen Activist of the Year Award from the United States Environmental Protection Agency; the Groundwater Guardian Award; the Water Hero Award, as well as the World of Poetry Gold Medal of Honor, and is an inductee into the Homer Honor Society of International Poets.

**Wenonah Hauter**

Wenonah Hauter serves as the Executive Director of the consumer group Food & Water Watch, which challenges the corporate control and abuse of food and water resources. The 50-strong nonprofit consumer rights group has campaigns in the areas of food and seafood safety, oceans preservation, and clean water access for all. Prior to her work with Food & Water Watch, Hauter directed the Critical Mass Energy and Environment Program at Public Citizen from 1997 to 2005. From 1996 to 1997, she served as Environmental Program Director at Citizen Action, where she worked with the organization's 30 state-based groups and ran a campaign that resulted in the building of wind turbines in several midwestern states. From 1989 to 1995 she was at the Union of Concerned Scientists, where, as a senior organizer, she coordinated broad-based, grassroots sustainable energy campaigns in several states. Early in her career, Hauter worked in several capacities to provide nutrition to low-income elderly in Virginia.

**Shri Rajendra Singh**

Shri Rajendra Singh, a much-honored Indian leader in rainwater harvesting and water conservation, is known as "the waterman of India." In 1985, Mr. Singh, along with the NGO he led, Tarun Bharat Sangh, traveled to Alwar, one of the poorest provinces in India. Water was scarce, cattle were dying in large numbers, the land was parched, and declared an irredeemable Black Zone by the Indian Government. Upon advice of a local village elder, Mr. Singh began organizing villagers to repair and deepen old johads (water harvesting structures). Today, over 20 years later, a total transformation has taken place in the region; 8600 johads in 1058 villages spread over 6500 sq.km. The men and women he trained have gone from village to village inspiring others to help themselves by creating their own watersheds. Mr. Singh has received numerous awards; 2005 Jamnalal Bajaj Award from the Jamnalal Jajaj Foundation, and on August 31, 2001, Mr. Singh was presented with one of India's most prestigious awards, the Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership.

**Jim Schultz**

Jim Schultz is founder and Executive Director of the Democracy Center based in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Founded in 1972, The Democracy Center works globally to advance human rights. Schultz has served as staff to the California Legislature, as an advocate with Common Cause and Consumers Union, and taught public policy and public administration to undergrad and grad students at San Francisco State University. As executive director of The Democracy Center, established in 1992, he founded the California Budget Project and trained and counseled thousands of citizen activists on five continents. He is the author of two books, The Democracy Owners' Manual (Rutgers University Press, 2002) and The Initiative Cookbook - Recipes and

Stories from California's Ballot Wars (The Democracy Center, 1996). His articles on democracy and public affairs regularly appear in newspapers across the U.S., Canada and the UK.

### **Vandana Shiva**

Vandana Shiva is a physicist, ecologist, prominent environmental activist, editor and author. Dr. Shiva is the Director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, was among those at the forefront of the movement to shut down Coca-Cola's bottling plant in Kerala, India, and she's written, spoken out and protested against Suez, the world's largest water company, from privatization efforts around the Ganges. In India, Vandana Shiva has established Navdanya, a movement for biodiversity conservation and farmer's rights. She is the author of 13 books and over 300 published papers. She serves as ecology advisor to several organizations, including the Third World Network and the Asia Pacific People's Environment Network, as well as the International Forum on Globalization. Ms. Shiva was awarded the 2001 Horizon 3000 Award of Austria in recognition for her defense of Human

Rights, the 2000 Pellegrino Artusi Award in Italy, and in 1993, The Right Livelihood Award from Sweden, commonly known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize."

### **Michel Camdessus**

Michel Camdessus (Managing Director, IMF (January 1987-February 2000) assumed office as Managing Director and Chairman of the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1987. After serving as Financial Attaché to the French delegation at the European Economic Community in Brussels from 1966 to 1968, he returned to the Treasury and went on to become Assistant Director in 1971, Deputy Director in 1974, and Director in February 1982. In November 1984. Mr. Camdessus was appointed Governor of the Bank of France, serving in this post until his appointment as Managing Director of the IMF. Mr. Camdessus was the 7th Managing Director of the IMF, and retired from the IMF in 2000.

### **Tyrone Hayes**

Tyrone B. Hayes, developmental endocrinologist and associate professor of integrative biology at UC-Berkeley along with his colleagues reported that atrazine, at levels often found in the environment, demasculinizes tadpoles and turns them into hermaphrodites - creatures with both male and female sexual characteristics. Dr. Hayes' research attracted worldwide attention when it demonstrated a significant correlation between atrazine in the environment and reproductive deformities in frogs. Atrazine, a white, crystalline, solid organic compound, is the second-most heavily used herbicide in the United States. According to its main manufacturer, the Swiss corporation Syngenta, atrazine is used on two-thirds of all cornfields and sorghum fields in the United States, on 90 percent of sugar-cane fields, and on residential lawns, golf courses, and Christmas-tree farms. Dr. Hayes was recently chosen as one of nine "visionary explorers" by National Geographic. His findings have been published in numerous publications, newspapers and scientific journals.

### **Gerard Mestrallet**

A graduate of the prestigious French engineering school, Polytechnique, and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA), Gérard Mestrallet joined Compagnie de SUEZ in 1984 as Vice-President, Special Projects. In 1986, he was appointed Executive Vice-President, Industry and then in February 1991, Executive Director and Chairman of the Management Committee of Société Générale de Belgique. In 1995, he became Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Compagnie de SUEZ and in June 1997, Chairman of the SUEZ Lyonnaise des Eaux Executive Board. On May 4, 2001, Gérard Mestrallet was appointed Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of SUEZ. He is also the Chairman of the Association Paris Europlace, and on the Board of the Institut Français des Administrateurs.

**Ronnie Kasrils** (Former Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry)



Ronnie Kasrils was a fierce fighter against the apartheid government of South Africa and an important member of the ANC. Kasrils has been a Member of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the African National Congress (ANC) since 1987. He has written several books on Bertrand Russell, poetry, and articles on Politics, Defense, Water and Forestry issues. His autobiography is *Armed and Dangerous: From Undercover Struggle to Freedom* (1993). Kasrils is the Minister for Intelligence Services since 2004.

### **David Hemson**

Dr Hemson is a research director in the Urban, Rural and Economic Development Research Program at Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC). As field researcher, Hemson discovered that while the post-apartheid government has expanded water service, the water price increase is beyond reach of many rural South Africans, driving the poor to cholera-laden rivers or lakes to fetch water. More than 18,000 people in South Africa die from diarrhea or dysentery every year, costing the country approximately 4 billion rand every year to treat and cope with the effects of water-borne diseases. Hemson has published widely in the fields of

dock labor, social history, literary analysis, gender analysis, public-private partnerships and water delivery. He has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Warwick.

### **Jim M. Olson**

Jim Olson is the senior principal of the firm, Olson, Bzdok & Howard and has over 25 years of legal experience. Olson is the lawyer for the case of Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation vs Nestle Waters North America. Olson has lectured at the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Leadership Institute, and at numerous professional associations, universities, and other organizations in the United States, Canada, and Brazil. He has written and published several books, one on Michigan Environmental Law, and numerous articles on environmental and land use subjects. Olson is a member of the American Bar Association and the Environmental Law Section, State Bar of Michigan, and is a member of the Grand Traverse-Leelanau-Antrim Bar Association.

### **Patrick McCully**

Patrick McCully is the executive director of IRN, (International Rivers Network) and IRN's Campaigns Director from 1994 to 2005. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the UN Environment Programme's Dams and Development Project, of the World Commission on Dams Forum, and oversaw the establishment of the World Commission on Dams. Mr. an advisory board member of EcoEquity, and of two Indian organizations, the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People and the Manthan Research Centre. Mr. McCully has written numerous articles, reports, and the book, *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams*.

### **Holly Wren Spaulding**

Holly Wren Spaulding is a writer and a founding member of Sweetwater Alliance, a direct action organization opposed to the corporate control of the commons. Her work has appeared in *The Ecologist*, *Clamor*, *Z Magazine*, *The New Internationalist*, *alternet*, and *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism* (Verso Press, 2003). She is currently working on a book for AK Press about the water commons. She teaches creative writing to college students lives near Lake Michigan on the Leelanau Peninsula.

### **Jean-Luc Touly**

The former administrative manager at Veolia Water, Mr. Touly was dismissed in March, 2006 by the Ministry of Labor, reportedly for having co-authored a book, "Multinationals and Water, The Unspeakable Truth" with Roger Lenglet. A frequent lecturer on water issues, Mr. Touly is President of ACME, the French branch of the Association for a World Contract on Water - [www.acme-eau.org](http://www.acme-eau.org). ACME works to resist the privatization and influence of business on water management by multinational corporations, and fights for the right to drinkable water for all. Mr.

Touly is a member of several ANTICOR associations fighting corruption in public procurement. A trade unionist and a labor arbitrator in the department of Créteil, Mr. Touly and Roger Lenglet co-authored the book "Vivendi Water" in November, 2003.

## - PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS

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### **DIRECTOR:** IRENA SALINA

Born in France, Irena started her career at 15 as a radio journalist in Paris, then worked in production in various capacities on numerous US films before writing and directing her first short, *See You on Monday*, sponsored by LifeTime Television for the Hamptons Film Festival. Her first film, *Ghost Bird: The Life and Art of Judith Deim* (2000) is an award-winning documentary that delves into the remarkable life of St. Louis-born artist Judith Deim. *GhostBird* was featured at many festivals, won Best Documentary at the 15<sup>th</sup> Fort Lauderdale Film Festival, the Presidents' Award at Mexico's prestigious Ajijic Film Festival, and is an evergreen audience favorite on the Sundance Channel.

### **PRODUCER:** STEVEN STARR

Founder of the award-winning creator sustainability pioneer Revver.com, Steven previously managed KPFK-FM, largest community radio signal in the U.S., co-founded P2P pioneer Uprizer, user-generated discovery platform AntEye.com and LA IndyMedia. Previously, as writer/director and/or producer of award-winning indie films such as *Joey Breaker* and *Johnny Suede*, co-creator/producer of *The State* for MTV/CBS. Prior to that, headed the New York film office for the William Morris Agency with clients such as Ang Lee, Tim Robbins, Larry David, Joseph Papp and Andy Warhol, etc, and started off as a concert promoter for Bob Marley and the Wailers.

### **CO-PRODUCER:** GILL HOLLAND

Spirit Award nominee for Producer of the Year, has produced over 40 films, including Sundance faves *Spring Forward*, *Loggerheads*, triple winner *Hurricane Streets* and the FOX sit-com *Greg The Bunny*. Gill also exec-produced Spirit Award winner *Sweetland*, HBO's Emmy-nominated doc *Dear Jesse*, and most recently exec-producing *The Adventures of Power*, and is renovating the first LEED-certified fully sustainable building in Louisville, Kentucky.

### **CO-PRODUCER:** YVETTE TOMLINSON

Producer credits include the feature *Rhythm of the Saints* – screened in competition at Sundance 2003, contributing producer for the Emmy Award-winning *South Africa Now*, collaborated on several other docs including *Mandela in America*, segment producer for A&E's *Biography of the Year* & CBS News' *The Twentieth Century* with Mike Wallace, won various awards including the Spike Lee Fellowship for her short, *Act Of Contrition*.

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:** STEPHEN NEMETH

Producer credits include *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Why Do Fools Fall In Love*, *Denise Calls Up*, *What We Do Is Secret*, *Finding TaTu*. Docs include *Dogtown* and *Z-Boys*, *Pick Up The Mic*, *Besibol*, *Tuner Nation* and *Project Street*. Stephen serves on the Advisory Board to Children's United Nations, *Wildlife Ecostation*, *Wheels For Humanity*, *Shine On Sierra Leone*, and *Artists for Amnesty*.

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:** BRENT MEIKLE

As an international business executive, Brent has spent the last 15 years developing and marketing consumer products. Brent has won numerous awards including design and innovation awards from the Consumer Electronic Association and American Graphic Art awards for product design and package innovation. Brent's involvement with *FLOW: For Love Of Water* inspired him to establish an entirely new consumer brand, *The Watergeeks Laboratories* ([www.thewatergeeks.com](http://www.thewatergeeks.com)). The company is intent on addressing the global water crisis by empowering consumers with compelling new water utilization choices that embrace their ecological beliefs. With over 50 patents on various products, *The Watergeeks Laboratories* will launch in 2008.

**Directed by**  
Irena Salina

**Produced by**  
Steven Starr

**Co-Produced by**  
Gill Holland  
Yvette Tomlinson

**Executive Producers**  
Stephen Nemeth  
Caroleen Feeney  
Lee Jaffe  
Augusta Brown Holland

**Executive Producers**  
Brent Meikle  
Cornalia Meikle  
Hadley Meikle

**Edited by**  
Caitlin Dixon  
Madeleine Gavin  
&  
Andrew Mondshein, A.C.E.

**Music by**  
Christophe Julien

**Cinematography by**  
Pablo de Selva  
Irena Salina

**Associate Producer**  
Matt Parker

## Who Owns Water?

Maude Barlow & Tony Clarke

*"Water promises to be to the 21st century what oil was to the 20th century: the precious commodity that determines the wealth of nations."*

As the World Summit on Sustainable Development draws closer, clear lines of contention are forming, particularly around the future of the world's freshwater resources. The setting of the summit paints the picture. Government and corporate delegates to the September meeting will gather in the lavish hotels and convention facilities of Sandton, the fabulously wealthy Johannesburg suburb that houses huge estates, English gardens and swimming pools, and has become South Africa's new financial epicenter. There, they will meet with World Bank and World Trade Organization officials to set the stage for the privatization of water.

At the same time, activists from South Africa and around the world with a very different vision will gather in very different settings to fight for a water-secure future. One such venue will be Alexandra Township, a poverty-stricken community where sanitation, electricity and water services have been privatized and cut off to those who cannot afford them. Alexandra is situated right next door to Sandton and divided only by a river so polluted that it has cholera warning signs on its banks. There could not be a more fitting setting for Rio+10 than South Africa, because neighboring Sandton and Alexandra represent the great divide that characterizes the current debate over water. Moreover, South Africa is the birthplace of one of the nucleus groups that form the heart of a new global civil society movement dedicated to saving the world's water as part of the global commons.

This movement originates in a fight for survival. The world is running out of fresh water. Humanity is polluting, diverting and depleting the wellspring of life at a startling rate. With every passing day, our demand for fresh water outpaces its availability, and thousands more people are put at risk. Already, the social, political and economic impacts of water scarcity are rapidly becoming a destabilizing force, with water-related conflicts springing up around the globe. Quite simply, unless we dramatically change our ways, between one-half and two-thirds of humanity will be living with severe freshwater shortages within the next quarter-century.

It seemed to sneak up on us, or at least those of us living in the North. Until the past decade, the study of fresh water was left to highly specialized groups of experts--hydrologists, engineers, scientists, city planners, weather forecasters and others with a niche interest in what so many of us took for granted. Many knew about the condition of water in the Third World, including the millions who die of waterborne diseases every year. But this was seen as an issue of poverty, poor sanitation and injustice--all areas that could be addressed in the just world for which we were fighting.

Now, however, an increasing number of voices--including human rights and environmental groups, think tanks and research organizations, official international agencies and thousands of community groups around the world--are sounding the alarm. The earth's fresh water is finite and small, representing less than one half of 1 percent of the world's total water stock. Not only are we adding 85 million new people to the planet every year, but our per capita use of water is doubling every twenty years, at more than twice the rate of human population growth. A legacy of factory farming, flood irrigation, the construction of massive dams, toxic dumping, wetlands and forest destruction, and urban and industrial pollution has damaged the Earth's surface

water

so badly that we are now mining the underground water reserves far faster than nature can replenish them.

The earth's "hot stains"--areas where water reserves are disappearing--include the Middle East, Northern China, Mexico, California and almost two dozen countries in Africa. Today thirty-one countries and over 1 billion people completely lack access to clean water. Every eight seconds a child dies from drinking contaminated water. The global freshwater crisis looms as one of the greatest threats ever to the survival of our planet.

### **Washington Consensus**

Tragically, this global call for action comes in an era guided by the principles of the so-called Washington Consensus, a model of economics rooted in the belief that liberal market economics constitutes the one and only economic choice for the whole world. Competitive nation-states are abandoning natural resources protection and privatizing their ecological commons. Everything is now for sale, even those areas of life, such as social services and natural resources, that were once considered the common heritage of humanity. Governments around the world are abdicating their responsibilities to protect the natural resources in their territory, giving authority away to the private companies involved in resource exploitation.

Faced with the suddenly well-documented freshwater crisis, governments and international institutions are advocating a Washington Consensus solution: the privatization and commodification of water. Price water, they say in chorus; put it up for sale and let the market determine its future. For them, the debate is closed. Water, say the World Bank and the United Nations, is a "human need," not a "human right." These are not semantics; the difference in interpretation is crucial. A human need can be supplied many ways, especially for those with money. No one can sell a human right.

So a handful of transnational corporations, backed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are aggressively taking over the management of public water services in countries around the world, dramatically raising the price of water to the local residents and profiting especially from the Third World's desperate search for solutions to its water crisis. Some are startlingly open; the decline in freshwater supplies and standards has created a wonderful venture opportunity for water corporations and their investors, they boast. The agenda is clear: Water should be treated like any other tradable good, with its use determined by the principles of profit.

It should come as no surprise that the private sector knew before most of the world about the looming water crisis and has set out to take advantage of what it considers to be blue gold. According to Fortune, the annual profits of the water industry now amount to about 40 percent of those of the oil sector and are already substantially higher than the pharmaceutical sector, now close to \$1 trillion. But only about 5 percent of the world's water is currently in private hands, so it is clear that we are talking about huge profit potential as the water crisis worsens. In 1999 there were more than \$15 billion worth of water acquisitions in the US water industry alone, and all the big water companies are now listed on the stock exchanges.

### **Water Lords**

There are ten major corporate players now delivering freshwater services for profit. The two biggest are both from France--Vivendi Universal and Suez--considered to be the General Motors and Ford of the global water industry. Between them, they deliver private water and wastewater services to more than 200 million customers in 150 countries and are in a race, along with others such as Bouygues Saur, RWE-Thames Water and Bechtel-United Utilities, to

expand to every corner of the globe. In the United States, Vivendi operates through its

subsidiary, USFilter; Suez via its subsidiary, United Water; and RWE by way of American Water Works.

They are aided by the World Bank and the IMF, which are increasingly forcing Third World countries to abandon their public water delivery systems and contract with the water giants in order to be eligible for debt relief. The performance of these companies in Europe and the developing world has been well documented: huge profits, higher prices for water, cutoffs to customers who cannot pay, no transparency in their dealings, reduced water quality, bribery and corruption.

Water for profit takes a number of other forms. The bottled-water industry is one of the fastest-growing and least regulated industries in the world, expanding at an annual rate of 20 percent. Last year close to 90 billion liters of bottled water were sold around the world--most of it in nonreusable plastic containers, bringing in profits of \$22 billion to this highly polluting industry. Bottled-water companies like Nestlé, Coca-Cola and Pepsi are engaged in a constant search for new water supplies to feed the insatiable appetite of this business. In rural communities all over the world, corporate interests are buying up farmlands, indigenous lands, wilderness tracts and whole water systems, then moving on when sources are depleted. Fierce disputes are being waged in many places over these "water takings," especially in the Third World. As one company explains, water is now "a rationed necessity that may be taken by force."

Corporations are now involved in the construction of massive pipelines to carry fresh water long distances for commercial sale while others are constructing supertankers and giant sealed water bags to transport vast amounts of water across the ocean to paying customers. Says the World Bank, "One way or another, water will soon be moved around the world as oil is now." The mass movement of bulk water could have catalytic environmental impacts. Some proposed projects would reverse the flow of mighty rivers in Canada's north, the environmental impact of which would be greater than China's Three Gorges Dam.

### **International Trade**

At the same time, governments are signing away their control over domestic water supplies to trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, its expected successor, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and the World Trade Organization. These global trade institutions effectively give transnational corporations unprecedented access to the freshwater resources of signatory countries. Already, corporations have started to sue governments in order to gain access to domestic water sources and, armed with the protection of these international trade agreements, are setting their sights on the commercialization of water.

Water is listed as a "good" in the WTO and NAFTA, and as an "investment" in NAFTA. It is to be included as a "service" in the upcoming WTO services negotiations (the General Agreement on Trade in Services) and in the FTAA. Under the "National Treatment" provisions of NAFTA and the GATS, signatory governments who privatize municipal water services will be obliged to permit competitive bids from transnational water-service corporations. Similarly, once a permit is granted to a domestic company to export water for commercial purposes, foreign corporations will have the right to set up operations in the host country.

NAFTA contains a provision that requires "proportional sharing" of energy resources now being traded between the signatory countries. This means that the oil and gas resources no longer belong to the country of extraction, but are a shared resource of the continent. For example, under NAFTA, Canada now exports 57 percent of its natural gas to the United States and is not allowed to cut back on these supplies, even to cut fossil fuel production under the Kyoto accord.

Under this same provision, if Canada started selling its water to the United States--which

President Bush has already said he considers to be part of the United States' continental energy program--the State Department would consider it to be a trade violation if Canada tried to turn off the tap. And under NAFTA's "investor state" Chapter 11 provision, American corporate investors would be allowed to sue Canada for financial losses [see William Greider, "The Right and US Trade Law: Invalidating the 20th Century," October 15, 2001]. Already, a California company is suing the Canadian government for \$10.5 billion because the province of British Columbia banned the commercial export of bulk water.

The WTO also opens the door to the commercial export of water by prohibiting the use of export controls for any "good" for any purpose. This means that quotas or bans on the export of water imposed for environmental reasons could be challenged as a form of protectionism. At the December 2001 Qatar ministerial meeting of the WTO, a provision was added to the so-called Doha Text, which requires governments to give up "tariff" and "nontariff" barriers--such as environmental regulations--to environmental services, which include water.

### **The Case Against Privatization**

If all this sounds formidable, it is. But the situation is not without hope. For the fact is, we know how to save the world's water: reclamation of despoiled water systems, drip irrigation over flood irrigation, infrastructure repairs, water conservation, radical changes in production methods and watershed management, just to name a few. Wealthy industrialized countries could supply every person on earth with clean water if they canceled the Third World debt, increased foreign aid payments and placed a tax on financial speculation.

None of this will happen, however, until humanity earmarks water as a global commons and brings the rule of law--local, national and international--to any corporation or government that dares to contaminate it. If we allow the commodification of the world's freshwater supplies, we will lose the capacity to avert the looming water crisis. We will be allowing the emergence of a water elite that will determine the world's water future in its own interest. In such a scenario, water will go to those who can afford it and not to those who need it.

This is not an argument to excuse the poor way in which some governments have treated their water heritage, either squandering it, polluting it or using it for political gain. But the answer to poor nation-state governance is not a nonaccountable transnational corporation but good governance. For governments in poor countries, the rich world's support should go not to profiting from bad water management but from aiding the public sector in every country to do its job.

The commodification of water is wrong--ethically, environmentally and socially. It insures that decisions regarding the allocation of water would center on commercial, not environmental or social justice considerations. Privatization means that the management of water resources is based on principles of scarcity and profit maximization rather than long-term sustainability. Corporations are dependent on increased consumption to generate profits and are much more likely to invest in the use of chemical technology, desalination, marketing and water trading than in conservation.

Depending on desalination technology is a Faustian bargain. It is prohibitively expensive, highly energy intensive--using the very fossil fuels that are contributing to global warming--and produces a lethal byproduct of saline brine that is a major cause of marine pollution when dumped back into the oceans at high temperatures.



## **A New Water Ethic**

The antidote to water commodification is its decommodification. Water must be declared and understood for all time to be the common property of all. In a world where everything is being privatized, citizens must establish clear perimeters around those areas that are sacred to life and necessary for the survival of the planet. Simply, governments must declare that water belongs to the earth and all species and is a fundamental human right. No one has the right to appropriate it for profit. Water must be declared a public trust, and all governments must enact legislation to protect the freshwater resources in their territory. An international legal framework is also desperately needed.

It is strikingly clear that neither governments nor their official global institutions are going to rise to this challenge. This is where civil society comes in. There is no more vital area of concern for our international movement than the world's freshwater crisis. Our entry point is the political question of the ownership of water; we must come together to form a clear and present opposition to the commodification and cartelization of the world's freshwater resources.

Already, a common front of environmentalists, human rights and antipoverty activists, public sector workers, peasants, indigenous peoples and many others from every part of the world has come together to fight for a water-secure future based on the notion that water is part of the public commons. We coordinated strategy at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, last January. We will be in South Africa for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September and in Kyoto, Japan, next March, when the World Bank and the UN bring 8,000 people to the Third World Water Forum. There, we will oppose water privatization and promote our own World Water Vision as an alternative to that adopted by the World Bank at the Second World Water Forum in The Hague two years ago. We will stand with local people fighting water privatization in Bolivia, or the construction of a mega-dam in India, or water takings by Perrier in Michigan, but now all of these local struggles will form part of an emerging international movement with a common political vision.

Steps needed for a water-secure future include the adoption of a Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons; a guaranteed "water lifeline"--free clean water every day for every person as an inalienable political and social right; national water protection acts to reclaim and preserve freshwater systems; exemptions for water from international trade and investment regimes; an end to World Bank and IMF-enforced water privatizations; and a Global Water Convention that would create an international body of law to protect the world's water heritage based on the twin cornerstones of conservation and equity. A tough challenge indeed. But given the stakes involved, we had better be up to it.