



The Catholic Women's League of Canada Position Paper

TITLE: Water

POSITION STATEMENT

The Catholic Women's League of Canada recognizes the interdependence of all members of the human family and the reliance on water for life. Drinking water, including its quality, distribution, privatization and conservation, is significant. The League affirms the urgency to use and protect water resources in a sustainable and controlled way for future generations.

- Water is a sacred gift connecting all life, indispensable for leading a healthy life with human dignity. Access to water is a fundamental human right. Water is the prerequisite to the realization of all other human rights.
- Water quality and conservation is a national and global concern from a climate change and pollution perspective.
- Water must be protected and well-managed as the most valuable natural resource and not treated as a commodity.

BACKGROUND

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis identifies fresh drinking water as “indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Sources of fresh water are necessary for health care, agriculture and industry.” Water demand now exceeds supply, and the poor quality of available water leads to death and the spread of diseases among the poor. Pollution is of significant concern, particularly where there is little or no regulation. The Holy Father views privatizing water sources (e.g. bottled water) as violating the universal fundamental human right to safe water. Water is “*essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.*” Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.*” He cites studies warning that “an acute water shortage may occur within a few decades unless urgent action is taken. The environmental repercussions could affect billions of people; it is also conceivable that the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century.”

The United Nations recognizes access to water and sanitation are a human right, fundamental to everyone's health, dignity and prosperity and calls on governments to take a human rights-based approach to water and sanitation improvements, leaving no one behind (UN Water). The inability of Indigenous communities in Canada to access clean drinking water is considered a human rights issue (Amnesty International). In 2023, 31 long-term drinking water advisories were in place in 27 First Nations communities. Progress, however, is being made through collaborative efforts between Indigenous leaders, communities and the federal government (Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs).

Canada's *Water Act* identifies national water preservation as a “matter of urgent national concern” and measures must be taken to ensure water quality management. Priorities include addressing the rapidly increasing demands on water resources and the pollution of Canadian water resources.

One of the key “Millennium Development Goals” that Canada and 169 countries committed to achieving by 2015 was the reduction by one-half of the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. Still, as of 2023, more than “40% of the global population does not have access to sufficient clean water. By 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity” (Canada, Global Affairs).

SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS

- Advocate for and support education and promotion of good practices for water sustainably.
- Monitor federal and provincial legislation and advocate for water resource protection through resolutions and actions such as letter writing.
- Encourage members to self-reflect on water use and encourage others to do the same.
- Raise water awareness by participating in events like World Water Day (March 22nd).

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Canada, Employment and Social Development. “Sustainable Development Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation.” *Canada.ca*, 4 Jan. 2023, www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/agenda-2030/clean-water.html.

Canada, Global Affairs. “Access to Water in Developing Countries.” *Canada.ca*, 17 Mar. 2023, www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/environmental_protection-protection_environment/water-eau.aspx?lang=eng.

Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs. “Ending Long-Term Drinking Water Advisories.” *Indigenous Services Canada*, 21 June 2023, www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660.

Canada, Legislative Services. “Canada Water Act.” *Justice Laws Website*, 23 June 2023, laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-11/page-1.html.

Francis. “Laudato Si’.” *The Holy See*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 24 May 2015, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

“Human Rights to Water and Sanitation.” *UN Water*, www.unwater.org/water-facts/human-rights-water-and-sanitation#.

“The Right to Water.” *Amnesty International Canada*, 26 Aug. 2021, www.amnesty.ca/what-we-do/indigenous-peoples-canada/the-right-to-water/.

STATUS

Date of initial adoption: March 2004

Date of current status:

Revised: August 2023