

An Additional Youth Statement on Water  
March 16, 2012

Youth are the future decision makers of the world. We must be forward thinkers because we will inherit a planet shaped by the actions of today. We are innovative by nature, and we call upon those involved in water issues to listen to and engage with our perspective. We are youth, but we do not speak for all youth, and we issue this document within the Alternative Water Forum to expand upon the youth voice presented at the 6th World Water Forum (WWF). This additional vision demonstrates that there exist myriad perspectives. Given that the WWF text will be incorporated into the Rio+20 process, we are compelled to share our voices with the world.

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Water is essential to all life, and as such cannot be allocated through market mechanisms. There is a human right to water and sanitation, as declared by the United Nations General Assembly<sup>1</sup>. Water should not be classified as an economic good or used as a political tool, rather it is a public resource, a common good.

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Water is simultaneously relevant on global, local, and regional levels with environmental, social, and political implications. Our management strategies need to reflect this complexity in several ways:

1. We need to engage all manner of communities and knowledge bases in management decisions. As humans, we have a right to education. This education can manifest in a variety of ways, including formal education and learning through living. This variety of experiences must be acknowledged and valued in the management of water.
2. We need to acknowledge the social and political aspects of water by cultivating a respect for water as a human right.
3. We need to acknowledge both the place-based and environmental aspects of water through basin-level, as opposed to nation-level, management.
4. Water is the foundation for life: the management decisions we make must accentuate this natural infrastructure rather than detract from it.

In these ways, we can ensure that decisions respect the rights of all peoples as well as the needs of the environment.

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We propose recapturing the sense of the word “Forum” as a place to discuss, debate and act together. We maintain that these fundamental connotations are not fully represented in the structure of the WWF.

The WWF is closed – through its price and its structure. The cost of admission is prohibitive even for many immersed in the world of water, and certainly for those most adversely

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations General Assembly declared safe, clean drinking water and sanitation a human right “essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights” on July 28, 2010. UNGA Resolution A/RES/64/292.

affected by mismanagement or scarcity. Youth now participate thanks to pressure for our inclusion; it seems appropriate, then, that we call for the inclusion of all those currently under-represented at the forum, including non-professionals, non-academics and impacted peoples.

The WWF, composed of panels, suits, hierarchy and speeches, has become a place to present rather than discuss. The private nature of the forum privileges certain voices to speak first and loudest, and thus controls the content and direction of discourse. We've heard the repeated desire of participants in the forum for a place to share -- the sense that the solutions are there and can be discovered through communication. The existence of the Alternative Water Forum is proof of this discontent, although this venue still does not provide a safe space for all.

An appropriate environment to discuss water must be more inclusive. Rather than undermine UN language, it must strengthen our commitment to the Human Right to water and sanitation. The forum would be transparent and open to all people and civil movements around the globe.

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We call upon governments, organizations, communities, and individuals – all humans of the world...

...To respect the human right to water and sanitation as distinct from other human rights obligations.

...To recognize water as a common resource rather than an economic good, and not to use it as a political tool.

...To engage in management based on water basins instead of political boundaries.

...To open the negotiation process to all stakeholders – corporate, public, and civic – through compassionate and honest dialogue.

In order to find new solutions we must find new ways of discussing water.

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with