



World Council of Churches
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To

**Churches and Ecumenical Organisations
in Europe and North America**

Geneva, 24 July, 2015

Sub: An appeal to eliminate use of bottled water in churches and institutions in Europe and North America

Dear Ecumenical Leaders,

Greetings to you from the International Reference Group of Ecumenical Water Network of World Council of Churches.

We the members of the International Reference Group (IRG) of the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) of the World Council of Churches are happy to inform you that the EWN continues to fight for human right to water and sanitation, with the leadership of WCC and its member churches and organisations.

The EWN strongly believes that among many impediments of realisation of human right to water is the “bottled water” industries. They have invaded practically every nook and corner of the world. Through their aggressive marketing strategies, they have been successfully captured the minds of people, particularly in the “developed” countries, to think that “bottled water” is safer and healthier than tap water. In the bargain, we have not only people from countries where tap water is not safe to drink buying bottled water at much higher prices, but also in developed countries in Europe and North America, where tap water is safe to drink.

Use of bottled water has many adverse impacts:

- 1) The “bottled water” industries are involved in “land grabbing” and “water grabbing” to expand their industry at the cost of prohibiting the poor to access safe drinking water. Many times governments shun their responsibilities to provide safe drinking water to the poor through their water distribution system, because people have the alternative of “bottled water.” The availability of “bottled water” allows the elites to ignore the government’s failure to provide the necessary infrastructure to provide safe drinking water.
- 2) Bottling water wastes water; typically, a litre of water is wasted for each litre of water that is bottled and it takes three times as much water to create a plastic water bottle than it does to fill it
- 3) Production of plastic for bottled water consumes a substantial quantity of fossil fuels and creates both air and water pollution.
- 4) The energy consumed in bottling and distributing bottled water is significant; if measured in terms of the oil equivalent, it takes ¼ litre of oil to produce and distribute a litre bottle of water. The greenhouse gas emissions as a result, burden our climate and aggravate climate change.
- 5) Bottled water adds billions upon billions of plastic bottles to our burden of solid waste. Over 63 billion plastic bottles are dumped in landfills, oceans, and landscapes each year. It takes 450 years for a single plastic water bottle to decompose. If incinerated, plastic releases a variety of toxic air pollutants. There is no good way to dispose of plastic solid waste, only lesser of evils.



The Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) is a network of churches and church-related organizations that promotes the preservation, responsible management and equitable distribution of water for all, based on the understanding that water is a gift of God and a fundamental human right. The EWN is an ecumenical initiative of the World Council of Churches.

- 6) Plastic debris, including the plastic holders for water bottles, kills more than a million seabirds every year as well as more than 100,000 marine mammals. The United Nations Environment Programme estimated in 2006 that every square mile of ocean contains 46,000 pieces of floating plastic.

For more information on the devastating impact of plastic water bottles, please visit:
<http://www.5gyres.org/the-plastic-problem/> and [The Problem with Bottled Water](#)

EWN, is strongly opposed to the use of bottled water in countries where tap water is safe to drink. We are saddened by the fact that in many offices of churches and ecumenical organisations in Europe and North America continues to sell bottled water at their cafeteria and offer bottled water in their meetings in these regions, given the fact that some of the safest and purest tap water in the world are found in these regions.

Therefore, we unanimously agreed in our recently concluded IRG meeting of EWN to request *all member churches in Europe and North America to eliminate use of bottled water and encourage others to eliminate use of bottled water whenever possible.* This action would be a sign of *our* prophetic stand and solidarity with more than 1.8 billion people around the world who lack clean and safe drinking water and must instead drink contaminated water.

We urge you to take these steps to synchronize our actions with what we preach and stand for!

Respectfully submitted,

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