



**Newsletter of the  
Ecumenical Water Network**  
**Number 1 – June 2006**

Dear colleagues and friends:

Greetings from Geneva!

This is the first newsletter of the Ecumenical Water Network. The EWN advocates for the right to water at the local, national and international level. It promotes community based initiatives on water and might address at a later stage also conflicts for water and security concerns. Aims are the promotion of exchange of experiences and information as well as lobby-work. In the EWN gather churches, church-related agencies and –initiatives. The EWN does not include project funding. This is done by the specialized ministries that are partners in the network according to their own guidelines

You are receiving this newsletter, as you have shown interest to know more about our work, by signing a list at the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brasil, last February, by participating in our first conference in Machakos, Kenya, last November, or because of some other contact you have had with us during the last months.

If you like, this newsletter will reach you about four times a year from now on. It shall inform you on the EWN itself, new developments concerning the human right to water, international water politics, and local water initiatives.

This first newsletter includes

1. The EWN at the WCC- General Assembly in Porto Alegre
2. Background of the EWN
3. Information on the World Water Forum and the Alternative Forum in Mexico City
4. Notes on upcoming events

I want to thank all who worked hard to get the EWN going, especially the small working group that accompanied the first steps with Asa Elfstrom (Church of Sweden), Gaim Kebreab (Norwegian Church Aid), Jesse Mugambi (University of Nairobi), Danuta Sacher (Bread for the World) and Annette von Schönfeld (Bread for the World). Annette and Danuta provided also the information on the World Water Forum that was first included in the newsletter of the BfdW *campaign* "Water is a human right." Our gratitude extends beyond this smaller circle to all who have so far accompanied and joined the EWN.

With best wishes,

Martin Robra  
WCC, Geneva

### **1. The EWN at the WCC – General Assembly in Porto Alegre**

With the water statement "Water for Life" by the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches the network is officially in the world. The statement will serve as

policy framework for WCC's work on water concerns and as a point of reference for advocacy since it found unanimous support by the Assembly.

Assembly delegates and visitors were impressed by the presence of partners active in the network. Their workshops were very successful and provided opportunities to encourage each other and to strengthen co-operation and networking.

Please find the text of the WCC water statement: "Water for Life" at:

<http://www.wcc-assembly.info/en/theme-issues/assembly-documents/1-statements-documents-adopted/international-affairs/report-from-the-public-issues-committee/water-for-life.html>

## **2. Background of the EWN**

The emerging EWN started to function in 2005. After a couple of smaller meetings, where the nucleus of the network met with the WCC climate change working group, a first event with a clear focus on water politics, community based initiatives and the human right to water in Africa has been realized in November 2005 in Machakos/Kenya.

Please find the text of the Machakos-declaration with other documents at:

<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/earthdocs.html#water>

Just prior to the WCC assembly, the Brazilian National Council of Churches (CONIC) and the Roman Catholic Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) invited together with the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches WCC assembly participants for a meeting on water struggles in Brazil. Brazilian and Swiss churches had issued a joint ecumenical declaration on the right to water the year before and were eager to share this excellent example of ecumenical co-operation.

Please find the text of the declaration at: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/ecearth-water-sek-feps.html>

Immediately after the assembly, a number of EWN member organizations took part in the Alternative Forum challenging the World Water Forum in March 2006 in Mexico City.

## **3. Information on the 4th World Water Forum and the Alternative Forum in Mexico City**

The World Water Forum is a meeting place on international water politics, which is organized by the World Water Council every three years since 1997. The WWC is strongly influenced by private (and transnational) companies. Consequently the main issues discussed in these meetings promote the necessity of private sector participation to solve the water crisis and the further commercialization of water. This year for the first time, the international water movement had organized a whole set of public events which challenged this point of view by reclaiming water as a human right and public good.

For further information see: [http://www.menschen-recht-wasser.de/index\\_ENG.php](http://www.menschen-recht-wasser.de/index_ENG.php)

### **a) New developments at the World Water Forum**

The fourth World Water Forum from 16th to 22nd of March in Mexico City differed from preceding events. The worldwide discussion about water and the importance of the growing water movement was reflected during the forum. The Right to Water played a central role in many workshops and was repeatedly referred to by resource persons and participants. For the first time, there seemed to be a consensus at the forum that the privatization of water services was not the best and only solution to the water crisis. Even the organizers of the World Water Forum, the World Water Council and

the Global Water Partnership as well as other organizations such as the World Bank have suddenly discovered a different usage: They published a leaflet about the "Right to Water". However, there is no reason to be overly optimistic. Even if the privatization of public water services is not discussed as the one and only option any more, it became clear that many water corporations are directing their interests towards the control of the water resources. Bottled water producing corporations such as Nestlé or Coca Cola want to take possession of as many ground water reservoirs as possible. The construction of mega dams is very high again on the agenda of the World Bank. Regarding irrigation agriculture, donors and investors are favouring huge agricultural projects which affect small farmers detrimentally by cutting them off their water supply.

More information about these issues can be found in English in the background paper "Water for Food – Water for Profit" at:

[http://www.menschen-recht-wasser.de/downloads/Water\\_for\\_Food\\_Hoering.pdf](http://www.menschen-recht-wasser.de/downloads/Water_for_Food_Hoering.pdf)

#### **b) The international water movement at and after the alternative forum**

A vast and colourful demonstration of almost 20.000 participants demanded the maintenance of water as a public good. The demonstration initiated the international debate in the context of the alternative forum. It was the first big public demonstration against a World Water Forum. The discussions at the alternative forum developed around topics such as water as a human right, public water services and democratic control, privatization critique, and water and environment. Besides the exchange of information, emphasis was put on the discussion of concrete alternatives to privatization.

The local reporting of both, the official and the alternative forum, was very encouraging. The alternative events and solutions called the attention of the local media, almost more so than the official discussions.

At the official forum, new approaches and policies, for example regarding corporate control of ground water reservoirs, construction of new mega dams, and big scale irrigation agriculture were discussed. At the alternative forum, the debate did not focus on these issues yet. A first opportunity for such new debates will present itself from May 10 to 13 in Vienna during the EU – Latin American economic summit when many activists will meet again.

The declaration of the International Forum on the Defense of Water held in Mexico City from 17th to 19th of March entitled "Joint Declaration of the Movements in Defense of Water" is available in English at:

[http://www.menschen-rechtwasser.de/downloads/Joint\\_Declaration\\_Water\\_Mexico\\_2006.pdf](http://www.menschen-rechtwasser.de/downloads/Joint_Declaration_Water_Mexico_2006.pdf)

#### **c) Present in Mexico: the Ecumenical Water Network**

The Ecumenical Water Network was also present in Mexico. In cooperation with the Mexican Center for Ecumenical Studies it organized a cultural – spiritual event about the meaning and importance of water in different religions. The event took place at the beautiful and attractively decorated Plaza Rio de Janeiro where people from various regions of the world described the violations of the Right to Water they have suffered. Representatives of the catholic, protestant and Jewish community were present as well as representatives of the Bahai and of an indigenous community. All of them commented on the experiences presented in many different ways. The most prominent speakers were the catholic bishop Raul Vera, famous in Mexico for his social engagement, and Tony Clarke, winner of the Right Livelihood Award.

## **4. Upcoming events**

Next steps in the journey of the Ecumenical Water Network will be two events in Africa:

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- a) Participation in the World Social Forum in January 2007 in Nairobi/Kenya  
For the first time the World Social Forum will take place in Africa. Water will be an important issue on the agenda. Together with the AACC and others, the EWN will be actively involved. You will find more information in our next newsletter
  
  - b) A follow-up meeting to the Machakos Conference in Uganda  
To strengthen the EWN on the African Continent, there will be a follow-up meeting of our Conference in Machakos in Entebbe, Uganda. This conference will take place during the first half of 2007 and deal with the EWN itself and the promotion of the human right to water and of community based initiatives to challenge the water crisis.

If you want to stay informed about the EWN, just stay on our list. You can also contact us via e-mail at: [water@wcc-coe.org](mailto:water@wcc-coe.org)  
In case you do not want to receive the newsletter any more, just send us a short message to: [water@wcc-coe.org](mailto:water@wcc-coe.org)