

## ***Let justice roll down like waters:*** **Faith-based advocacy and water for all.**

Maseru, Lesotho, 21-24 April 2008

### **1. Introduction**

“Water is a symbol of life. The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God’s grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation (Genesis 2:5ff.). It is a basic condition for all life on Earth (Genesis 1:2ff.) and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation (Romans 8:19ff.; Revelation 22). As churches, we are called to participate in the mission of God to bring about a new creation where life in abundance is assured to all (John 10:10; Amos 5:24). It is therefore right to speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat..”

Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14–23 February 2006

### **The Ecumenical Water Network**

The Ecumenical Water Network 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.

Throughout the world, churches and their partners are witnesses to the importance of water for life. They see in their communities how people are deprived of adequate access to clean and affordable water, they face the consequences of environmental degradation and the growing threats caused by climate change. In many places, churches and faith-based organizations are actively committed to empowering communities and challenging decision-makers.

The Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) has been created to foster exchange and international cooperation among churches, church-related organizations, and their partners from civil society. Our aim is to learn from each other and to unite our voices in the face of the growing threat to life and creation. Besides advocating for the recognition and implementation of the human right to water, the EWN is dedicated to the mobilization of churches and related organizations in the support of community-based initiatives that help to create sustainable access to water and sanitation thereby contributing to the achievement of the targets set by the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

In February 2006, the 9th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches endorsed the water statement “Water for Life”, with the resolution to “foster cooperation of churches and ecumenical partners on water concerns through participation in the Ecumenical Water Network”.

The Ecumenical Water Network has already organized several events with a focus on water politics, community based initiatives and the human right to water. A particular priority has so far been given to the African continent. In November 2005, representatives of churches, ecumenical organisations and civil society groups came together in Machakos/Kenya to attend the first conference of the emerging network. During the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January 2007, the EWN organized a series of workshops, lectures, and a youth concert on water and climate change within the ecumenical platform of the All-Africa Conference of Churches and Caritas Internationalis.

In May 2007, over 70 participants from 19 African countries as well as from Europe and Latin America met in a conference in Entebbe, Uganda, which was jointly organized by the Secretariat of the Ecumenical Water Network, All Africa Conference of Churches, Uganda Joint Christian Council, and the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development.

### **2. Concept of the workshop**

#### **Program and participants**

Already at the conference in Entebbe, it was suggested to have a follow-up workshop in Lesotho focusing on advocacy for water for all. In many of the presentations about the situation regarding access to water in Africa, participants found that there was a need to speak up for more responsible and just governance and management of the continent’s water resources.



In Lesotho, one of the main issues in the context of water management is the construction of big dams to make possible large-scale water transfers. It is clear that this is a policy option which is growing in importance all over Africa. It is promoted as a way to provide water and energy for much needed economic development. However, the history of dam-building shows that such large-scale projects often have considerable negative impacts on affected communities and on the environment.

The workshop will focus on the case of Lesotho to illustrate and discuss the need for policies that prioritize human development and sustainable development. It will look into how the human rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups can be promoted and protected. Not only the impacts of big dams will be analyzed, but also the processes of policy formulation and the importance of transparency, participation, and democratic decision-making. The link with policy-formulation in South Africa will also be addressed.

To broaden the perspective of the workshop, another advocacy issue will be taken up in the program. Looking at the current debate and on-going court case about pre-paid water meters in South Africa, we can deepen our understanding of the human right to water and at the same time highlight an issue which, like dams, is relevant to a number of other African countries.

Bringing together primarily church leaders, the program will provide space to deliberate on the role of the churches and faith-based organizations in challenging duty bearers and encouraging rights holders, based on the Gospel's message and inspired by our faith. Staff from church development programs and from civil society organizations will also be invited to participate and share their experiences in working with communities. Field visits will contribute to a better understanding of the situation of communities in Lesotho that are affected by the construction of the dam, droughts, and lacking access to water.

The workshop aims to give answers to the following question: What can be done at the local and national level to work on the right to water? What needs to be done to enable local churches and local civil society organisations to take such a work up? In which ways is it possible to create capacities to document violations of the right to water and to monitor and challenge relevant government policies? What resources are needed to start a meaningful right to water work at the local, regional, national, and/or international level?

## **Partners**

The participants in the EWN understand that the water crisis has common causes and symptoms across the world, but requires often action and solutions that are based on regional and local conditions. These can only be developed and implemented by the people and organizations in the respective countries and locations. It is therefore an important principle of the network that the EWN only become active where we can count on the mutual support of national and local partners.

The workshop will be organized jointly by the Secretariat of the Ecumenical Water Network and partners from Lesotho. A local organizing committee (LOC) has been created, which comprises representatives of the Christian Council of Lesotho, the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist church, as well as relevant civil society organizations (Transformation Resource Center, Development for Peace Education, Lesotho Council of NGOs, PELUM). The LOC will actively contribute to the development of program and methodology, and assists in the planning, preparation, and implementation of the workshop.

## **Financing**

The workshop is expected to bring together about 50 participants from Lesotho as well as from other African countries facing similar advocacy challenges. The EWN Secretariat will be covering all expenses related to the organization of the conference as well as travel and accommodation for participants coming from Lesotho. Expenses for travel and accommodation for participants from other countries will be met by individual participant organizations of the Ecumenical Water Network. Reimbursements will be handled by the Secretariat of the EWN.

## **Contact**

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