



Water, Territory and Substantive Democracy: building political projects in defence of life

Declaration of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network

World Water Day, 22 March 2020

We arrive to World Water Day 2020 in a context where the levels of **severity and complexity** of the challenges facing life in the planet seem to have escalated to a point that puts to the test even the capacity of the most powerful countries to find viable and efficacious solutions. In [Public Statements](#) published previously we have addressed in detail many of the challenges that we face in relation to **water Politics and management**, which do not need to be repeated and we just summarize here as a reminder of the strategic and high priority issues:

- The prevalence of **top-down**, frequently **lacking transparency**, **undemocratic**, or straightforwardly **authoritarian** and **exclusionary** characteristics of water government and management worldwide
- The qualitative and structural inequalities, particularly **class, gender, ethnic, and age-related inequalities**, among other, in the **access to water** for essential human uses
- The anthropogenic character of water-related **disasters** and their **asymmetric impacts** on human populations, from those caused by extreme climatic events, water-related epidemics and pandemics, being water a source, carrier, or essential need for their prevention, or the inadequate management, often criminal, of large-scale water infrastructures that pose high risks for people and life, among other issues
- The **direct involvement** of governments and private corporations, such as mega mining and hydroelectric companies or agribusinesses, in the **brutal repression**, including assassinations, violent population displacements, and other **criminal forms of repression** against those struggling for the democratization of water Politics and management, from indigenous and peasant communities and social movements of the affected sectors to members of the academic communities committed to the production of critical knowledge and political action to confront these processes
- In Latin America, for example, the arrival of right and extreme right actors to power in many countries including Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay and, more recently in Bolivia and Uruguay, in addition to their perpetuation in Chile, that in cases like Brazil openly defend **criminal policies** directed against the more vulnerable and excluded sectors and against those who take a critical position in relation to these processes, has deeply aggravated the situation and threatens to accelerate and escalate the **destruction of the living conditions of millions** and the **destruction of the material basis of life**, including water sources. Regrettably, the existence of recently elected progressive governments in the region, for example in Mexico and Argentina, **does not guarantee** that the advance and deepening of structural inequalities in relation to water Politics and management will be reduced or eradicated.



- The **co-optation and control of the processes of knowledge production and circulation**, in particular scientific knowledge, by governments and other actors that hold social, economic and political power make these processes subservient to the **increasing monopolization of water sources and water-based services**, among other issues, by a relatively minuscule group of international corporate interests, through different methods including the **control of research funding and of the orientation of scientific policies** to serve such interests, but also the **coercion and intimidating and repressive actions** against the production and circulation of knowledge critical of these processes
- Although these inequalities characterize the prevailing global situation, their impacts affect mostly the vulnerable social groups, which is also the case in the wealthiest countries and in the more established democracies, as very unfortunate and crudely shown by the impact of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. At the start of the third decade of the XXI Century, still for millions of humans even **washing their hands with clean water is something unattainable**.
- These and other conditions that are unfavourable for the advance of **the processes of substantive democratization** in our societies were already placing obstacles, probably insurmountable, for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, including the full and universal exercise of the **Human Right to Water**. With the aggravation and escalation of the global crisis, the SDGs have been converted in another Utopia that risks being shelved in the history archives, not owing to physical-natural, technical, financial or cultural causes, as some have argued, but rather by fundamentally **Political and ideological reasons**.

By means of our Declaration, whose title we take from [XI International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network](#), which will take place in Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, on 5-9 October 2020, we

- demand that governments and international “development” and financial institutions **abandon their politics of defence, support, and promotion of**
 - national and transnational **corporate interests**, which represent a minuscule group of privileged sectors in our societies
 - the privatization, monopolization, commodification, etc., by different means, of water sources and essential water services
 - the unregulated, outright illegal, and even **criminal** expansion of extractivist activities (agribusinesses, large-scale mining, construction of hydraulic mega projects, etc.)
 - **repressive politics**, often lethal, that are part and parcel of the criminalization of the activities of the affected sectors, indigenous and peasant communities, workers unions, social movements, among many others, who take action in defence of water, their territories, and life itself.



- We also demand that that governments and international “development” and financial institutions
 - give priority to the defence of human populations against the **structural inequalities** and their impacts, and to guaranteeing their enjoyment of the basic conditions that make life possible in the planet
 - introduce radical changes in their politics and redirect these to the promotion and support of the defence of water as a **common, public good**, of the access to water for essential uses as an **unalienable right**, and of public and community water management, with adequate funding. We demand politics that promote the development of public and community services that give priority to the satisfaction of essential needs and guaranteeing the **water security of human populations, and livings beings** more generally
 - immediately leave free the political prisoners who have been condemned for defending their rights, their territories, and their waters. We consider that incarceration and repression, including torture and assassination, of those who defend their territories and waters, constitute a **crime against humanity** and an **intolerable violation of the fundamental rights of individual persons and peoples**
 - radically change their politics in relation to the production of knowledge, to focus it on contributing to the **confrontation of structural inequalities** and to promote the advance and deepening of the processes of **substantive democratization** of our societies. Governments and international institutions must support the production of knowledge oriented at the defence of water as common and public good, as a universal, human and trans-specific right that gives priority to **the preservation of life**.

