

VI ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NETWORK

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014



Organizers:



Supporters:



The meeting supported the Blue October Campaign against the control and commodification of water by private corporations.



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MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

FINAL DECISIONS AND DECLARATIONS

The meeting successfully achieved its objective of providing a space for discussion, exchange, debate and the collective generation of concrete projects and products oriented at responding **the central question of the event: What are the priorities for egalitarian water politics?**

We present next some of the strategic decisions taken in the meeting and a synthesis of our key conclusions, aimed at responding the central question. We also produced several declarations and manifestations of support, demand, and denunciation related to problems that became prominent in our debates.

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

Strategic Decisions

The WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network and the Public Services International (PSI) agreed to establish a strategic alliance to strengthen their capacities to confront the threats against the democratization of water politics and management. Especially, we seek to **strengthen the interaction between academics, workers organizations, public sector institutions, social movements of urban, peasant, and indigenous groups, and civil society groups more generally**. Our alliance will focus mainly on **research, education, and practical intervention** in the field of essential water and sanitation services, including their ecological-environmental dimension.

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Main priorities identified in the VI Annual Meeting for the development of egalitarian water politics

- 1) Contributing to the **confrontation of the diverse forms of violence affecting human communities** as a result of the commodification of water sources and essential water and sanitation services, the deregulated and uncontrolled expansion of open cast mining, of hydraulic megaprojects, including energy projects based on fracking technologies, the spread of transgenic monocropping and the associated intensive use of agrochemicals/agrotoxics, often unregulated or even illegal, among other issues.
- 2) Supporting the **struggles against the processes of commodification and privatization** that threaten to deepen the process of destruction of the foundations of life, such as the monopolization of the production of seeds by multinational companies and the consequent reduction of biodiversity and the violation of peoples' food sovereignty.
- 3) Supporting the **struggles to defend the socio-ecosystems that constitute the basis of life**, many of them under severe threat if not already in danger of disappearing, such as wetlands, moors, glaciers, mangroves, springs, etc.
- 4) To struggle against the **visible and invisible forms of violence related to water politics and management**, such as the **repressive violence** against individuals and organizations that defend the rights of populations, workers, and the citizenry more generally. Also struggling against the **symbolic, epistemic, emotional, and other forms of violence** implemented in different fields of activity with the

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

goal of legitimating anti-democratic politics and **intimidating those who defend models of society grounded on the ideal of equality and reject the commodification of social relations and of the process of life in general.**

5) **Defending the control and management of water** as a common good, a public good, a human right, that must be in the hands of public or community utilities, subject to democratic control and operating with transparency.

6) To **denounce and confront the strategies and mechanisms** used by the agents that promote the **consolidation of neoliberalization processes in relation to the politics and management of water and water services.** After the resounding failure of the politics promoted since the 1980s, especially the open privatization of water sources and services through long-term concessions or, in extreme cases like Chile or England, through the transfer of the ownership of water sources and infrastructures to private companies, a diversity of new tactics have been developed to achieve the same objectives by other means. A particularly successful way to forcibly achieve the commodification and privatization of water and water services has been the **spread of bi- and multi-lateral agreements to protect investments and to open up markets for goods and services.** A key objective of these strategies is to cancel the sovereignty of national states and to stop citizens from being able to fully exercise their civil, political and social rights. These agreements provide a guarantee to private companies, especially multinational companies, to have the right to extract profits from the relevant countries even in cases where they do not comply with their contractual obligations. Countries like Argentina, to give just a notorious example, have already lost dozens of cases before the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), even in disputes involving private companies convicted of fraud in their countries of origin, like the US or France, and that had failed to comply with their contracts in the country. The central countries are currently trying to consolidate this dictatorship of financial capital through the implementation of a new instrument seeking to subordinate the sovereignty of countries to the interests of capital by means of the so-called **Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA).** It is crucial to analyse, document, and expose the concrete consequences that these strategies will have in the Global South, especially in Latin American and Caribbean countries, which are a priority target of these policies.

7) **Struggling against private-public corruption (PPC),** manifested in many ways in the water and water services sector. We need to transform the dominant perception that has been created by institutions and governments that defend a privatist and mercantilist water politics according to which corruption would be essentially an issue of public entities. This vision has contributed to discrediting public institutions and politics more generally. It is crucial to demonstrate that **corruption is endemic in the relations between the state and private actors,** and that it is often promoted by the very national and international actors that raise their accusing finger against public corruption, such as the international financial institutions and the governments of central countries that monopolize the production of "rankings" of transparency and corruption.

8) Promoting and consolidating **public-public, public-community, and community-community alliances,** and to develop other forms as it may be needed, to **strengthen the struggles against the threats facing the process of democratization of water politics and management** and to advance this process further.

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

9) **Conceiving and strengthening innovative models of water politics and management** that prioritize inter-sector practices that break with the dominant techno-centric approaches, that are framed by principles of democratic public policy making, with mid and long-term planning, with effective and not merely formal social participation, and with democratic control. These models must promote public management and include **mechanisms to prevent the use of public institutions as a cover for the process of mercantilization and private profiteering**, such as “public-private partnerships” (PPPs) or the transfer of shares of public utilities to private investors, among other forms.

10) Strengthening the Network’s [Thematic Area 7](#) to develop Artistic, Communicational, Cultural, and Educational activities to promote the emergence and consolidation of **social forms that break with the mercantilist and privatist frameworks** and contribute to generate policies, management models, and ways of relating to water and water services **grounded on the ideal of equality**.

11) Prioritizing the themes mentioned above in the activities of research, teaching and practical action of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network, fostering X-disciplinarity, the topic of our Network’s [Thematic Area 1](#). X-disciplinarity consists in the constructive trespassing of disciplinary boundaries to generate epistemological ruptures, incorporating diverse knowledges, including knowledges that do not follow conventional scientific rules, to produce theoretical and empirical knowledge about water. Consolidating and deepening X-disciplinarity by means of alliances between academic actors, workers organizations, social movements, representatives of communities, and other relevant actors in the struggle for the democratization of water politics and management, and for the construction of more humane societies, grounded on the ideal of equality.

Plenary of the VI Annual Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network, Manizales, Colombia, 31 October 2014.

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

Declarations and manifestations of support, demand, and denunciation

1) Declaration in support of the defence of water as a common good, a public good, and a human right in Colombia.

To the national, regional, and local authorities of Colombia, we want to remind their constitutional obligation, including the obligation to respect international treaties, to care for the interests of their population. We are particularly concerned with the authorities' political, social and juridical responsibility regarding the violations of fundamental rights that, whether by act or omission, may be committed against the citizenry and the communities affected by the impacts of open cast mining, hydraulic megaprojects, open or disguised projects to privatize water sources and essential water and sanitation services, or by the weakening of environmental regulations through the passing of "fast-track" licensing, among other urgent matters.

i) Violations of workers' rights in the water and sanitation sector

We want to highlight the very worrying fact that, according to research reported by the Public Services International (PSI), Colombia is the world's most dangerous country to be a workers' union leader, given that around 60% of the world's assassinations of unionists take place in Colombia. Among the people under death threat owing to her militancy as a unionist against water privatization and the corruption in the management of public services is our colleague Margarita López, President of the Workers' Union of Acuavalle, SintraAcuavalle. We make a special request to the Colombian authorities asking them to guarantee the physical integrity and the rights of the citizenry mobilized for the defence of their living conditions, and particularly those of the union representatives like Margarita López and others who continue to be under death threat owing to their defence of public services.

To the European authorities, particularly the European Parliament and their representation in Colombia, given that several foreign companies involved in the processes mentioned above have their headquarters in European territory, to contribute towards the monitoring of the business and professional behaviour of such companies in Colombian territory. It is expected that these companies abide by the same rules applied to them in Europe.

ii) Violations of the rights of communities in the Eastern Caldas Region

The current model of development in Colombia promotes projects that are the cause of multiple environmental conflicts in the country. These conflicts are worsening the weakening of the State in a context that prioritizes the private accumulation of profits through neoliberal international agreements and alliances. In the case of the Eastern Caldas Region, peasants, fishing communities, indigenous people, local miners, afro-descendant communities, and all other humans living directly in contact with the ecosystems, have their basic conditions of survival seriously affected because of the prevailing model of development. Therefore, we state that:

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

The Eastern Caldas Region that has substantial water resources including the La Miel River, a tributary of the Great Magdalena River, an exuberant biodiversity with high levels of endemism, and a valuable ethos for the use and management of water developed by the region's aboriginal communities, has become a target for large hydroelectric projects during the last two decades.

The negative socio-economic impacts of the hydroelectric projects already implemented in the region exceed disproportionately the benefits promised to the local communities, while the environmental impacts, scarcely monitored by the authorities, have placed the region in a high level of vulnerability.

The relationship with water as a central element in the construction of territories among the region's communities has been severely affected by substantial transformations that brought a sense of hopelessness to the local population. Among other problems identified we highlight the growing scarcity of water for domestic and productive use, declining fish fry populations, the drying up of water sources, the increase of epidemic breaks related to water management issues, and the changes introduced in the productive activities of the population that have led to increasing economic uncertainty, among other issues. These examples illustrate the harmful effects that these projects have brought to the region. There is a danger that these negative impacts may be worsened and extended in the region, taking into consideration the fact that an important number of rivers is already undergoing a process of licensing for the construction of several hydroelectric plants.

The scant institutional attention paid to these problems, associated with the interplay of economic and political interests by dominant social groups, has damaged the trust of the region's communities in the capacity and willingness of the State to protect their interests and rights.

Therefore,

- It is imperative to guarantee the permanent support to the population and social organizations of the Eastern Caldas Region, which are affected by the processes described above
- We make a special plea to the Colombian authorities to guarantee the physical integrity and the rights of these populations
- To the European authorities, particularly the European Parliament and their representation in Colombia, given that several foreign companies involved in the processes mentioned above have their headquarters in European territory, to contribute towards the monitoring of the business and professional behaviour of such companies in Colombian territory. It is expected that these companies abide by the same rules applied to them in Europe.

**Plenary of the VI Annual Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network,
Manizales, Colombia, 31 October 2014.**

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

2) Declaration of solidarity with the Mexican people for the death and disappearance of students in Iguala Municipality, Guerrero.

Before the events that took place in Iguala Municipality, Guerrero, Mexico, on 26 September 2014, where three young students from Ayotzinapa Rural School were assassinated together with three other people from the same community and 43 students from the same school disappeared without trace until today,

The members of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network

- Condemn the assassination of three young students from Ayotzinapa Rural School.
- Condemn the forced disappearance of 43 students from the same school.
- Demand the return of the 43 students, alive.
- Require the clarification of these events, which aggrieve the human rights of the students, of the Mexican population, and by extension of the peoples from the countries represented in this Meeting.
- Join the Mexican people in their demand for justice before these events against humanity
- Express our solidarity with the families of the students from Ayotzinapa Rural School.

**Plenary of the VI Annual Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network,
Manizales, Colombia, 31 October 2014.**

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

3) Statement on the water problems affecting Jalisco, Mexico: El Zapotillo. Impact on water cycles and violation of human rights

Within the framework of the VI Annual Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network “Water, violence and utopias in Latin America and the Caribbean. What are the priorities for egalitarian water politics?”, academics, students, community and workers’ union leaders, and environmental activists from the Americas and Europe, based on public information provided by the Mexican government and civil organizations,

State our preoccupation about:

FIRST. The Altos de Jalisco Region is threatened by a social conflict caused by a deficient model of public water management related to the construction of El Zapotillo Dam, and the water transfer from this site to the city of Leon, in the neighbouring state of Guanajuato.

SECOND. The national and provincial authorities have neglected the application of the best practices accepted internationally for integrated water management, particularly those related to guaranteeing the democratic participation of all those potentially affected by the impacts of the project. We observe that there is a lack of reliable studies to confirm the environmental and social feasibility of the inter-basin water transfer. There are reasons to believe that the construction of this project may have harmful impacts in a region that is already under the effect of a long-term, severe water scarcity. We consider that this situation of water stress, which national and international scientists have predicted will likely worsen in the near future owing to climate change, must be seriously considered, in depth, before the implementation of the project.

THIRD. It has been identified that there are serious irregularities in the management of the project. In particular, it has been observed that the authority in charge of the Lerma-Santiago-Pacific Basin is giving priority to the interests of the private companies in charge of the construction of the project rather than complying with their responsibility to care for human rights, for the wellbeing of the population, and for the sustainability of the environment in the Altos de Jalisco region.

On this basis, the members of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network plea:

To the Mexican authorities,

- Full respect for the human rights of the population affected by this project.
- Open access and transparency in the availability of public information about all components of the project.
- To take into account the risk analyses of environmental impacts resulting from the project.
- To include citizen participation in the discussions about the pertinence of this project and in the search for alternatives, democratically, to achieve results that are just and fair.
- To pay attention to water demand management principles as an alternative to the prevailing supply-side models characteristic of megaprojects like the projected dam and inter-basin transfer in the Altos de Jalisco.
- To pay attention to the recommendations made by the Citizen Observatory for the Integrated Management of Water in the State of Jalisco.

VI ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WATERLAT GOBACIT NETWORK

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

- To apply the highest available standards of peaceful conflict resolution in the search for an integral solution to the problem.
- That, as a sign of good will, the authorities proceed to suspend the construction works until the social conflict receives proper attention and is fully settled.

To the European authorities, in particular the European Parliament and their representation in Mexico,

- given that several foreign companies involved in the processes mentioned above have their headquarters in European territory, to contribute towards the monitoring of the business and professional behaviour of such companies in Mexican territory. It is expected that these companies abide by the same rules applied to them in Europe.

**Plenary of the VI Annual Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network,
Manizales, Colombia, 31 October 2014.**

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

4) Statement about the water crisis affecting the Sao Paulo Metropolitan Region, other cities served by the Sao Paulo Basic Sanitation Company (SABESP), and other areas supplied from the same water sources, in Brazil.

The model of privatized water management, including cases where public companies allow shareholding by private investors in the stock market, is in crisis. The events currently affecting the Sao Paulo Metropolitan Region (SPMR) and neighbouring cities illustrates the situation.

The SPMR, a metropolis with nearly 20 million people, faces a serious water crisis that could leave around 8 million people without water. It is not unfeasible to imagine an even worse scenario where the whole population is affected, given that the company responsible for the service, the Sao Paulo Basic Sanitation Company (SABESP), has decided to implement water transfers between different reservoirs. This is a foretold catastrophe because back in 2004, when the water rights to provide the service in the SPMR were renewed, the city was already living in a water crisis. That year SABESP made a commitment that included measures to prevent the potential worsening of the lack of water, such as leakage reduction, tapping new water sources, water saving programmes, and the reuse of water for industrial purposes. However, these measures were either neglected or not implemented at all, which is at the root of the current crisis. It is also important to highlight that since the end of the 1990s many researchers had anticipated that the current situation was likely to happen.

What are the main causes of the current crisis? We argue that, among other factors, a crucial issue has been that according to data provided by the company SABESP, a large share of their revenue is transferred to their private shareholders rather than being used to implement the actions needed to prevent or at least mitigate the effects of the water crisis. Thus, although nominally SABESP is a public company, in practice it gives priority to the interests of private shareholders over those of the citizens and users it serves.

Moreover, the mercantilist model of water management adopted by SABESP lacks transparency, which makes unfeasible the monitoring and democratic control of the company. For example, the information about the actual situation of the water reserves of the Cantareira Reservoir, badly affected by high demand, inadequate management, and low rainfall (a situation predicted since the 1990s by researchers), was provided to private shareholders but not to the public opinion. The media and the researchers working on the issue were only able to get the information through copies of the reports that SABESP had distributed among their private shareholders. Only then, it became possible to make a public assessment of the water crisis affecting the state of Sao Paulo.

The lack of democracy in water management, in the context of the foretold crisis of water supply in Sao Paulo, is behind some questionable decisions taken by the company, such as the implementation of water transfers between reservoirs, a timid policy to contain the high consumption of large water users, such as the industrial sector, and the lowering of the pressure in the water network during the day. These measures have affected mainly low-income sectors, particularly working women who after returning home find that there is no water for personal hygiene and domestic needs. There is emerging evidence that a large share of the population, especially women, are suffering the effects of the water crisis caused by SABESP's mercantilist model of water management, which has a negative impact on their living conditions.

VI ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WATERLAT GOBACIT NETWORK

MANIZALES, Colombia, 27-31 OCTOBER 2014

This mercantilist model, despite the fact that the government is heavily involved in the management of the services, is inadequate for the population of the state of Sao Paulo. The poorest sectors of the population have been subjected to undignified living conditions and there is a real prospect of future water insecurity for the whole population. The water sources are declining, but the transfer of resources tapped from the population to the company's private shareholders is secured by the current management model.

This scenario prompts the members of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network meeting at the University of Caldas, in Manizales, Colombia, to

- express their solidarity with the population of the affected areas of the state of Sao Paulo, in this time of crisis
- point at the urgent need to review the management model in the main Brazilian metropolis and other regions of the state of Sao Paulo affected by the crisis
- state that this mercantilist model to manage basic water and sanitation services
 - should not be replicated in other regions
 - must be revised through actions such introducing transparency and allowing greater social participation to monitor and exercise democratic control in the management of water resources and services
 - must be subject to mid- and long-term interventions involving democratic, participatory planning, without political interference from the state government, which controls SABESP.
- The causes of the problem lead us to request the **suspension of all revenue transfers from the company to its private shareholders until the water security of the region is brought under control and secured.**

**Plenary of the VI Annual Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network,
Manizales, Colombia, 31 October 2014.**