

Women's Caucus Statement for "Access to Basic Water Services" Session of the CSD-13

12 April 2005

A well-known Chinese proverb says that women hold up half the sky. We submit to you that when it comes to water, women hold up more than half the sky. We are often the primary ones responsible for obtaining clean water for our families and household uses, and we often suffer the most from lack of access to clean, safe water resources. Therefore women play a key role in water resources management and must be integrated as key decision makers in all policy development and implementation ensuring equitable access to basic water services.

For thirteen years, since the 1992 Earth Summit, women have been at the forefront in putting gender equality at the center of commitments made by governments to address the issue of access to basic water services. We urge all governments, donor countries, monetary and financial institutions, to honor their commitments to improve access to water. Commitments are not enough; the time for action is now.

Women endorse a rights-based approach to providing access to water, as stated in par. 10 of the chair's draft text and General Comment 15 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Water is a human right.

A rights-based, pro-poor approach to water requires the following actions:

- Treating water as a public good rather than a commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace. A market-based approach to providing water services has negatively impacted on women and has failed to address the needs of women and their families. Privatization is not working. Therefore, we call upon governments to strengthen the capacity of the public sector to provide access to water.
- Ensuring women's rights to security of land tenure and land inheritance as preconditions to solving the problems of lack of access to clean water.
- Addressing the need for pollution prevention and cleanup. We support the well-established polluter pays principle, and urge governments to create and enforce legislation which requires corporations to internalize the costs of polluting activities, rather than leaving them as a burden upon society.
- Investing in infrastructure development, including innovative technologies like rainwater harvesting, in order to drastically reduce the time burden borne by women and girls, whose water-related responsibilities prevent them from engaging in other productive activities, including education.

For many women around the world, access to clean water is a matter of life and death; working together with us, you can save lives and build stronger communities.