

PRESS RELEASE

World Water Day, the 22nd March**Turning on a tap and getting drinking water, an impossible daily gesture for 2.1 billion people**

«Connect yourself for Justice» reports that the scarcity of water affects around 2.8 billion people worldwide for at least one month per year

Madrid, 22nd March 2019. - The celebration of World Water Day is an ideal occasion to become aware of how the simple daily gesture of turning on a tap and getting drinking water it is not possible for 2.1 billion people around the world.

On this day, the entities that promote the campaign "If you take care of the planet, you fight against poverty" and the initiative «Connect yourself for Justice» - Caritas, CEDIS, CONFER, Justice and Peace, Manos Unidas and REDES (Network of Entities for Solidarity Development) - emphasize the problems faced by human communities around the world as a result of severe restrictions on access to water. It is estimated, for example, that water scarcity affects some 2.8 billion people in all continents of the world for at least one month each year.

MAIN PROBLEMS

The lack of water distribution systems is suffered most by rural communities that are far from the range of these distribution systems. For that reason, the rural communities are forced to travel long distances every day to obtain safe water. There is a problem of pollution from human action in addition to de lack of water distribution.

It is estimated that 80% of all industrial and urban wastewater is released into the environment without any prior treatment. In addition, intensive agricultural production requires fertilizers and phytosanitary products that contaminate available water resources with pesticides. This loss of water quality has detrimental impacts on human health and ecosystems.

Climate change is another factor triggering the problems of access to water in many regions of the planet. Global warming can finish some essential sources of water supply, such as glaciers, while residents of some coastal areas are seeing their groundwater sources contaminated by brackish flows as sea levels rise.

The privatization of water, by large bottling companies that appropriate a common resource for private and minority use, is another challenge we face in guaranteeing the right of access to water.

This is a right that is subject to multiple violations at the international level. On the 2014 Annual Report, the UN Special Relator on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation brought the main violations of this right to the attention of the Human Rights Council, and she encouraged the use of International Treaties such as the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OP-ICESCR) to denounce States if they are responsible for them.

As the Relator explained, "if more attention were paid to violations of the rights of water and sanitation and their structural causes, marginalized groups could be empowered to obtain effective remedies. In order to remedy individual violations, the determination of patterns of violation will also contribute to prevent such violations and they will oblige governments to address their structural causes in policymaking and budgetary allocations".

These violations are often related to broader deprivations and other violations, in particular with the human rights to life, health, food, housing, education, work and a healthy environment.

CONSEQUENCES

Disputes over control of scarce water resources in arid regions or during periods of drought are the source of serious episodes of violence and destruction of water system infrastructures. These infrastructures are considered military targets and they are used as tools of warfare during wars.

As well as natural disasters, conflicts due to water resources origin important population displacement and their settlement as refugees in areas with insufficient resources to cover basic water needs.

In addition, water scarcity and pollution affect more than 40% of the world's poorest people according to UN data. And although 2.6 billion people have had access to improved drinking water sources since 1990, 663 million are still lacking of that possibility.

Current water consumption is 6.5 times higher than it was at the beginning of the 20th century and it is predicted that this consumption will continue growing significantly. This means that many of the main aquifers are being overexploited and polluted: limited water resources are being depleted faster than they can be replenished on their own, compromising the sustainability of water as a renewable resource. As a result, nearly 1,000 children die every day from preventable water and sanitation-related diseases.

The Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* is very sensitive to this issue.

"Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity". (LS, 30).

CALLING TO ACTION

Since last October, the campaign "If you take care of the Planet, you fight against poverty" has been developing a second stage focused on the dissemination and reflection of the programmatic axes of the *Laudato Si'* within each Christian community and in diocesan territories throughout the country. This new stage will put the focus on the urgency of "fighting poverty". Along these lines, World Water Day is an ideal moment to launch a call to action on a personal and community level to promote transformative measures.

Among the individual actions, the Campaign proposes, for example, calculating and reducing the water footprint of each person, or drinking water from the tap whenever possible. And on a community and social level, Campaign suggests measures such as researching what is happening in the area where people live regarding access to water, its exploitation and sustainability; defending water as a basic good that should be the object of public management; or supporting the enactment of a Due Diligence Law in Spain in the area of Human Rights in order to achieve effective application and the defence of these rights in economic and business activity.

#ConnectWaterPoverty

More information: www.enlazateporlajusticia.org/en