

Open letter

To: Mr. Joan Clos, UN-HABITAT Executive Director

Cc: UN-HABITAT Governing Council members

8 April 2011

Dear Mr. Joan Clos,

During the Global Water Operators Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA) Congress in March, it came to our attention that funds to the GWOPA were to be cut and that GWOPA would therefore no longer be able to actively support regional WOP platforms. Instead, it is to focus on knowledge management and advocacy work.

We, the undersigned organisations would like to express our great concern in this regard. It would be tantamount to downscaling the priority which UN-HABITAT would give to water and sanitation programmes. In advance of the upcoming 23rd Session of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT, we would like to emphasise how much we value UN-HABITAT's ongoing work and commitments in this sector.

It is widely recognised that access to water supply and sanitation is critical for successful health and education service delivery, thus leading to social development and poverty reduction as well sustainable urban development. Half of the world's population now lives in towns and cities, and this percentage will increase to 70% by 2050. UN-HABITAT has taken a crucial lead in mobilising attention for the crisis in access to water and sanitation under the theme of Water for Cities: Responding to the Urban Challenges. UN-HABITAT's contribution in this area has been significant, especially its leadership to host GWOPA, which has huge potential for accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goal.

These same points were addressed by yourself during the World Water Day Congress – Water and Urbanization - in Cape Town, South Africa last March. We were so encouraged that you indicated that safe drinking water and basic sanitation must be placed at the very top of the poverty eradication and sustainable development agendas. The establishment of the UN-Habitat's Water and Sanitation Programme to 'contribute to the achievement of the internationally agreed goals related to water and sanitation in human settlements with particular focus on the urban poor, in order to facilitate equitable social, economic and environmental development' was a reflection of this commitment.

We applauded UN-Habitat's offer to host the GWOPA on the request of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan after he had received the "Hashimoto Action Plan"<sup>1</sup> from the UN

---

<sup>1</sup> "First we must help the operators that deliver water services. Publicly owned and managed water services currently provide more than 90% of piped water supply in the world. The Board recommends a new mechanism, Water operator partnerships (WOPs), a structured programme of cooperation, based on the concept of mutual support among water operators, on a not-for-profit basis; even small managerial change could bring major improvement..."

Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB). We shared the conclusions of the "Hashimoto Action Plan", which are being implemented by the GWOPA. Over 90% of water and sanitation operators are public entities, and thus represent the same proportion of the available experience in running water services. By providing a vehicle to mobilise and share the expertise embedded in public water utilities, the GWOPA holds great potential for improving the institutional and human capacity to increase access to water and sanitation. Without such a mechanism, the public utilities will likely remain isolated behind their geo-political boundaries and little transfer of real know-how will take place.

This is why we as civil society organisations and trade unions together with public water operators have actively engaged in developing GWOPA. The GWOPA has made quick and impressive progress just within three years: WOPs projects are implemented in Asia & Pacific (40 projects since 2008), Latin America and the Caribbean (20 projects) and elsewhere. New regional and sub regional WOPs platforms would not have been established in Africa, Arab countries and South East Europe without the GWOPA's active support. The GWOPA secretariat held its successful first congress and general assembly last month, where more than one hundred water specialists and stakeholders congratulated the GWOPA on its fast progress. They confirmed that the WOPs approach is promising and should be further developed to meet the MDGs on drinking water supply and sanitation.

Importantly, the GWOPA is doing work which no other agency in the UN has managed to do so far. It is reaching out specifically to local public utilities, and is including as stakeholders civil society and workers as well as their trade unions. This new programme needs time and the resources to deliver on the commitments made by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

It is within this context that we are particularly concerned to hear that the Water and Sanitation Trust Fund (WSTF) will not complete its own strategic plan (2008-2012) and that funding to the GWOPA will be cut and therefore it will not be able to sustain its institutional capacity.

As outlined in the WSTF strategic plans, "development of water and sanitation services are seen as part of wider processes of settlement development and improvements in the living environment of in particular, the urban poor". We urge UN-HABITAT to maintain its commitment to funding water sector activities and to specifically support the GWOPA in sustaining its capacity.

We sincerely hope the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT will recognize the importance of the Water and Sanitation programme and allow the GWOPA to fulfill its promise.

Yours sincerely,

---

## Signed organizations

Public Services International, Global  
Abvakabo FNV, the Netherlands  
UNISON – The public services union, UK  
Alliance of Government Workers in the Water Sector (AGWWAS), the Philippines  
Kenya Local Government Workers' Union (KLGWU), Kenya  
EPSU- European Federation of Public Service Unions

Transnational Institute, the Netherlands  
Federación Ingeniería Sin Fronteras (Engineers without borders), Spain  
Corporate Europe Observatory, Belgium  
Food and Water Watch, USA  
Plataforma de Acuerdos de Cooperación Públicos y Comunitarios  
(Platform for Public and Community Partnerships of the Americas)  
African Water Network  
Advocacy and Monitoring Network on Sustainable Development (AM-NET), Japan  
Amrta Institute for Water Literacy, Indonesia  
Municipal Services Project, Global  
Focus on the Global South, Thailand, Philippines and India  
Ecologistas en Accion, Spain  
Globalisation Monitor, Hong Kong  
Solidarity Workshop, Bangladesh  
Center for Excellence of Change (CEC), India  
CeVI-Centro di Volontariato Internazionale (Center for International Voluntary Service), Italy  
Public Interest Research Network, Scotland  
Institut Européen de Recherche sur la Politique de l'Eau  
(European Institute of Research on Water Policy), Belgium  
Irrigation Training & Economic Empowerment Organization (IRTECO), Tanzania  
Association for International Water Studies (FIVAS), Norway  
FFOSE (Federacion de Funcionarios de OSE), Uruguay  
CNDAV (Comision Nacional en Defensa del Agua y la VIDA), Uruguay  
Cambodia's Independent Civil-servants Association, Cambodia  
Aquattac, Europe  
Fundación IPADE, Spain  
Coordinadora de ONG para el Desarrollo (CONGDE), Spain  
ACRA(Associazione di Cooperazione Rurale in Africa e America Latina), Italy  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, USA  
Center for Women's Global Leadership, USA  
Aniban ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura, Philippines  
Umeedenao Citizen Community Board, Pakistan

OSE - Obras Sanitarias del Estado, Uruguay  
Asociación Española de Operadores Públicos de Abastecimiento y Saneamiento  
(AEOPAS) (Spanish Association of Public Water and Sanitation Operators)  
Aguas Bonaerenses Operator ( 5 de Septiembre S.A.), Argentina