

To: His Royal Highness Willem-Alexander, the Prince of Orange
Chairperson of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on
Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB)

Mrs Anna Tibaijuka, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of
UN-HABITAT

July 2007

Your Royal Highness, Mrs Tibaijuka,

With this letter we would like to express our strong support for the proposed UN mechanism for enabling Water Operator Partnerships (WOPs). Empowering the public sector through creating not-for-profit partnerships between public water operators can bring significant progress for the one billion plus people in the developing world who do not have assured access to safe drinking water, not least in peri-urban and rural areas.

The WOPs initiative offers a new and fresh approach, after a decade dominated by unrealistic expectations about the contribution that the private sector could make to solve the water crisis of the world's poorest. Whereas numerous instruments have been developed in recent years for the promotion of privatisation in the form of public-private partnerships (PPPs), the WOPs initiative is unique in its clear focus on enabling public water operators to strengthen and support each other. We believe the WOPs are one of the most important innovations in recent history. This creates a historical opportunity - and a collective challenge - to create a process and institutional mechanisms that truly reflect the values we all believe in, including transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, responsiveness and democracy.

Notwithstanding our strong support for the WOPs proposal, we would like to express some concerns about the process to shape the WOPs mechanism as it has evolved over the past year, and to make some suggestions to help ensure that the final mechanism is as effective as possible, and maintains the central focus on public utilities in the global south.

As you will know, when the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board first recommended water operator partnerships, via the Hashimoto Action Plan, they said:

“Cooperation between water operators, or Water Operators Partnerships (WOPs) can be useful mechanisms for providing support for capacity building of public water operators. Given the preponderance of public sector undertakings, it is envisaged that most operating partnerships will be between public operators. However, we do not exclude private sector operators, NGOs or those who can contribute to the performance of public water undertakings on a not-for-profit basis.”

We believe that this statement is important in that it confirms some core principles for these partnerships, namely the emphasis on public utilities and that all participants should take part on a not-for-profit basis. We understand that the not-for-profit principle in particular was strongly supported recently at the regional seminar held in recently in Johannesburg to develop water operator partnerships in Africa. We are of the view that these principles are fundamental to the success of these partnership schemes. As pressures emerge to allow the use of the WOPs mechanism for commercial purposes, the not-for-profit character of the WOPs must be vigorously maintained.

Keeping the aims of the WOPs mechanism in mind, it is vital that government policy-makers and public water managers are given a central role in the whole process. Indeed, since the WOPs mechanism is meant to facilitate interaction and exchange among water operators, it is imperative that the end users - the public water operators themselves – are enabled to take the lead in shaping the mechanism. We would argue that the active involvement of public water managers from developing countries in this process is of particular importance to ensure that the WOPs mechanism optimally contributes to the MDGs. It is our impression that the process until now has been lacking in these qualities.

In recent months, a program of regional events has been organised to begin an outreach process. External funding (from the UK and other donors) was given to help the Asian and African workshops fund utility managers to be able to attend. However, we have concerns about the degree of transparency and inclusiveness in the organisation of some of these events. As a result of these shortcomings, important people from key utilities as well as from civil society groups were inadvertently excluded. Moreover, there was an over-reliance on a number of international financial institutions which have a reputation for operating in ways that are not in tune with the above-mentioned WOP principles. This has created a disincentive for some to participate.

We would therefore like to make the following proposals to you. We hope that you will endorse these and will ensure they are taken forward:

- The creation of a reference group of public water managers and water unions that are strongly committed to and champions of the public-public partnership approach. This reference group, which should have strong representation of actors from developing countries, must be funded to enable it to meet regularly and it must be recognized as a group with influence and authority by those taking the WOPs proposal forward within UN Habitat and elsewhere.
- Priority must be given to achieving high levels of transparency around the WOPs mechanism as well as to starting a discussion on how to secure accountability and monitoring of individual partnerships. As part of this, the important role that civil society can play in this area must be recognised and nurtured. One idea could be that, through a working group, CSOs and others would develop recommendations in these areas.

We have other suggestions about how the process to develop WOPs should proceed henceforth. However, we believe these two constructive proposals are of fundamental and immediate importance and we hope that you will help ensure they are taken forward.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

1. 11.11.11 - Coalition of the Flemish North South Movement - Belgium
2. ABVAKABO FNV – The Netherlands
3. African Water Network
4. ALPINE RIVERKEEPERS - Australia
5. Amrta Institute - Indonesia
6. Anti-Hydroelectric Dams National Movement - El Salvador
7. AOSED - Bangladesh
8. Attac - Finland
9. BanglaPraxis - Bangladesh
10. Berliner Wassertisch - Germany
11. Blue Planet Project - Canada
12. Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale - Italy
13. Canadian Union of Public Employees - Canada
14. CENSAT – Friends of the Earth - Colombia
15. CER-DETA Amigos de la Tierra - Bolivia
16. Coalición de Organizaciones Mexicanas por el Derecho al Agua – Mexico
17. Collective Initiative for Research and Action - Nepal
18. Comisión Nacional en Defensa del Agua y de la Vida - Uruguay
19. Comitato Italiano per il Contratto Mondiale dell'Acqua - Italy
20. Confederation of Independent Unions In the Public Sector – The Philippines
21. Consorci per a la Gestió Integral d'Aigües de Catalunya - Spain
22. Consumer First Network - Kenya
23. Corporate Accountability International - USA
24. Corporate Europe Observatory – The Netherlands
25. Dutch GATS Platform – The Netherlands
26. ECOFONDO - Colombia
27. Ecologistas en Acción - Spain
28. Edupaz - Mexico
29. Ingeniería Sense Fronteras - Spain
30. Ecumenical Water Network - Switzerland
31. FASE Solidariedade e Educação - Brazil
32. Federación de Funcionarios de Obras Sanitarias - Uruguay
33. Federación Nacional de Trabajadores del Agua Potable y Alcantarillado del Perú – Perú
34. FIVAS - Norway
35. Focus on the Global South - Thailand, India and the Philippines
36. Food & Water Watch - USA
37. France Libertés – Fondation Danielle Mitterrand - France
38. Frente Nacional pelo Saneamento Ambiental - Brazil

39. Frente Unido en Defensa Del Ecosistema – Panama
40. Friends of the Earth - Canada
41. Friends of the Earth - Finland
42. Fundación Cuenca Lerma Lago Chapala-Santiago - Mexico
43. Fundación para el Desarrollo Urbano – Costa Rica
44. Globalization Challenge Initiative - USA
45. Group of Concerned Citizens - Malaysia
46. Indian Social Action Forum – India
47. International Committee for the Global Water Contract – Portugal / Belgium
48. Maithri and Water Kerala Network - India
49. Malian Committee for the Defense of Water – Mali
50. Mani Tese - Italy
51. Manthan Adhyayan Kendra - India
52. Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation - Malaysia
53. Movimiento mexicano de afectados por las presas y en defensa de los rios - Mexico
54. Mumbai Paani - India
55. National Coalition Against Water Privatisation – Ghana
56. Norwegian Church Aid - Norway
57. Norwegian Solidarity Committee for Latin America - Norway
58. Observatorio de la Deuda en la Globalización – Spain
59. Organizacion Sindical de Cooperativas y Empresas Recuperadas de la Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (ANTA-Cta) - Argentina
60. Our Water - Germany
61. Otros Mundos – Mexico
62. Oxfam Solidarity – Belgium
63. People's Coalition for The Right to Water - Indonesia
64. People's Health Movement International - USA
65. Polaris Institute – Canada
66. PROTOS: “Water: the lever for development” – Belgium
67. Proutist Universal - Italy
68. Public Interest Research Network (Water Group) – Scotland
69. Public Trust Alliance - USA
70. Red de Género y Medio Ambiente.
71. Red de Sindicatos del Sector del Agua de Latinoamérica Afiliados a la Internacional de Servicios Públicos
72. Rede Brasileira pela Integração dos Povos - Brazil
73. REDES – Friends of the Earth - Uruguay
74. SANIPLAN - USA
75. Sindicato de Obras Sanitarias de la Provincia de Buenos Aires – Argentina
76. Solidarity Workshop - Bangladesh
77. The Springs Foundation - UK
78. Taller Ecologista - Argentina
79. Transnational Institute
80. UNISON - UK
81. Vikas Adhyayan Kendra - India
82. WaterAid - UK
83. Water and Energy Users' Federation - Nepal

84. Water Movement - Norway
85. World Development Movement - UK
86. Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action – India

1. A.J. (Bert) Roebert - Deputy Managing Director Amsterdam Water Supply (retired), former Director of the N.V. Water Transport Company Rijn-Kennemerland – Netherlands
2. David Barkin - Professor of Economics, Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco – Mexico
3. Julián Perez - Activist and advisor for the second water war in El Alto – Bolivia
4. Ing. Luis Mario Padrón – Technical Assistant Manager of 5 de Septiembre S.A. –Trade Union of Water Service Operators - Argentina
5. Santiago Arconada Rodríguez – Advisor to HIDROVEN and HIDROCAPITAL - Venezuela
6. Silvano Silvério da Costa – President of ASSEMAE (Associação Nacional dos Serviços Municipais de Saneamento) – Brazil
7. Dr V. Suresh - Centre for Law, Policy and Human Rights Studies, Chennai – India
8. Mariana Suzuki Sell – Instituto de Pesquisas Avançadas em Economia e Meio Ambiente, member of the Board of Directors – Brazil
9. Riccardo Petrella - President of AcquaPubblica, Italian association of public water companies and water territorial authorities – Italy
10. Ratan Bhandari, National Concerns Society - Nepal
11. Rabin Subedi, Co-Director, Nepal Policy Institute - Nepal
12. Dr. Visoth Chea – Assistant General Director, Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority – Cambodia
13. Maude Barlow - National Chairperson, Council of Canadians and Founder, Blue Planet Project – Canada
14. Asim Nawaz Khan – Chairman, Umeedenao Citizen Community Board – Pakistan
15. Peter Hartmann – Coordinador, Coalición Ciudadana por Aisén Reserva de Vida – Chile