

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

WATER,
AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT
FOR LIFE

DESIGNING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

An update

*A CONTRIBUTION OF THE HOLY SEE
to the Sixth World Water Forum*

Marseille, 12-17 March 2012

VATICAN CITY, 2012

INTRODUCTION

At the time of the World Water Forums of 2003, 2006 and 2009, the Holy See prepared some reflections. On the basis of its competence, which is predominantly of a moral order, it called attention to several relevant topics, reaffirmed the importance of water, and supported actions aimed at improving its protection and use worldwide.

Kyoto 2003

On the occasion of the Kyoto Forum, the Holy See's document, *Water, an essential element for life*,¹ discussed water as a common factor within the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. Attention was drawn to the dramatic situation in which people live who do not have drinking water, to problems of its access and management; and to its excessive, irresponsible use in developed countries in conjunction with the growing demand for it due to population increases.

The document defines water as a *social element* – linked to health, food and conflicts; as an *economic element* – necessary for the production of goods and energy (yet it cannot be considered as a commodity like any other, because it is a gift of God indispensable for life); and finally as an *environmental element* – because of its role in sustaining the environment and in natural disasters.

Further, because it is indispensable for life and integral human growth, on the occasion of the Kyoto Forum, the Holy See expressed its hope for a formal recognition of the *right to drinking water*; and this as a fundamental, inalienable human right based on *human dignity*. And lastly, the document highlighted water's religious value and its connection with the problems of poverty.

Mexico City 2006

During the Mexico City Forum, in an update of the earlier document,² the Holy See considered water above all as a *global responsibility* because it is a fundamental element of God's creation – given for the use of every individual and people, and a key factor for peace and security in their lives.

The new document even expressed the hope that a *culture* would be promoted to value, respect and consider *water* not as a commodity but as a *good* destined for everyone. Such a culture is fundamental for the management of water according to justice and responsibility, also with reference to natural disasters.

Istanbul 2009

During the Fifth Forum in Istanbul, the initial document was updated with the subtitle: *And now a matter of greater urgency*.³ The new text urged the analysis of drinking water in conjunction with sanitation, both being fundamental to determining its proper stewardship. Regarding the right to water, the Holy See noted that it needs to be proposed more explicitly, even though it is now indirectly recognized in international texts. A call was made for the promotion and explicit recognition of this right, that is rooted deep within human dignity.

Commenting on current statistical trends, the Holy See pointed out that the Millennium Development Goals⁴ concerning water were unlikely to be reached by 2015 and that, with this likely failure, any partial attainment would represent a serious shortcoming on the part of the international community.

¹ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Water, an essential element for life*, Vatican City 2003.

² Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Water, an essential element for life – An update*, Vatican City 2006.

³ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Water, an essential element for life and now a matter of greater urgency – An update*, Vatican City 2009.

⁴ Goal 7.c.

II. MAKING AN ASSESSMENT, DESIGNING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

In 1990, Blessed John Paul II made a heartfelt appeal regarding “the urgent moral need for a new solidarity”⁵ concerning the ecological crisis and the correct use of natural resources. Two years later, the United Nations organized a Summit in Rio de Janeiro on “Environment and Development” – a historic event, with worldwide repercussions, that contributed significantly to outlining development goals for the next twenty years.

The crucial role of water in development has been recognized by initiatives such as the first activities of the World Water Council in the mid-1990s, the UN decision to call the “Water for Life” Decade (2005-2015); and the creation in various governments and international organizations of programmes dedicated to its complex problems.

Today – amidst a violent economic crisis also linked to the irresponsible exploitation of natural resources, the unhinging of finance from the real economy and of profit from sustainability – it is time to make an assessment of the current urgent situation and to outline effective solutions for the problems left open. It is crucial that this take place in view of the Rio+20 Conference to be held in June 2012, and in view of further necessary reflections on water in connection with the integral development of peoples.

It is encouraging that the organizers of the Sixth World Water Forum have chosen to entitle this event *Time for solutions*. The Holy See expresses its strong hope that in 2012 incisive decisions will be made based on valid principles, that “virtuous” practices will be institutionalized and universalized, since next year is dedicated by UN to water cooperation.⁶ In this context, the Holy See hopes that this document will offer a useful contribution.

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXIII World Day of Peace (1 January 1990)*, No. 10.

⁶ UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 65/151. International Year of Water Cooperation, 2013*, A/RES/65/154, 11 February 2011.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

I. PROGRESS IN AFFIRMING THE RIGHT TO WATER AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT IT

The Holy See and the proposal of rights regarding collective goods including water

In 1990, Blessed John Paul II spoke about “the right to a safe environment ... as a right that must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights.”⁷ The following year, in his Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, this is presented as a right that corresponds to a “collective good” whose protection cannot be guaranteed by simple “market mechanisms”,⁸ but through everyone’s cooperation.

In 2003, John Paul II reflected on the growing and worrying divergence between a series of new rights promoted in the technologically advanced consumer societies, and the elementary human rights that are still unmet, especially in situations of underdevelopment, like the right to drinking water.⁹

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published in 2004, specified that “the right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment,” and clarified that it is “a universal and inalienable right”.¹⁰

In 2009, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that the right to water has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life.¹¹

The path of the United Nations

In recent years, the United Nations General Assembly has taken an interest on several occasions in the right to water and explicitly enshrined it in 2010, defining it as the “right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation”.¹² In the same resolution, it is recognized as a fundamental right essential for the full exercise of the right to life and all human rights. In the preamble of this historic resolution, the General Assembly also mentions General Comment No. 15 (2002) of the *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* which specifies the normative content of the right to water, the obligations of the States Parties to the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and those of the non-state actors involved, including international financial institutions.¹³

The following year, the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque¹⁴, made an important contribution to greater understanding of the concrete possibilities of achieving this right and presented some good practices and conditions for success, including the clear identification of responsibilities.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXIII World Day of Peace (1 January 1990)*, No. 9.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 40.

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXXVI World Day of Peace (1 January 2003)*, No. 5.

¹⁰ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004, No. 485.

¹¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, No. 27.

¹² UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *The human right to water and sanitation*, A/64/L.63/Rev.1*, 26 July 2010.

¹³ Cf. ECOSOC, *General Comment No. 15 (2002). The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, E/C.12/2002/11, 20 January 2003.

¹⁴ Cf. UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque*, A/HRC/18/33, 4 July 2011.

Again in 2011, following this hoped-for recognition, on the basis of the Special Rapporteur's report, the *Human Rights Council* made an appeal to the Member States for its effective implementation.¹⁵

II. THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE DONE

1. Too many people are without drinking water

Still today, in different contexts, many people cannot live in a dignified way and are particularly exposed to morbidity and mortality. In fact, access to drinking water of sufficient quantity and quality is lacking. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that the figures regarding such access that are usually put forth in international arenas do not reflect the complexity of this phenomenon. The geographical distribution of the people still in need of adequate access to water makes the solution to the problems even more difficult.

Access to drinking water of insufficient quantity

Some communities lack a sufficient quantity of water to satisfy their needs, or they do not have water in their vicinity and have to travel long distances to obtain it;¹⁶ or they depend on resources that vary according to the seasons and precipitation. To these *natural* restrictions are added *human and technical* ones, such as the lack of adequate institutions; the impossibility of storing or paying for drinking water; the sudden loss of the usual sources or the water management structures because of conflicts or new, high consumption activities.¹⁷

Access to water of insufficient quality

The good quality of drinking water is not guaranteed unless there are adequate and efficient mechanisms of purification and sanitation. Nor is it guaranteed if basic information is lacking to distinguish *truly drinkable* water from *apparently drinkable* water which, on the contrary, requires treatment to *make it drinkable*.¹⁸ In some places, certain communities do possess and control mechanisms of purification and sanitation which are effective and compatible with their economic and technological level but insufficient for treating highly-polluted water such as sewage or industrial waste.

The underestimated statistics on thirst

The situations described above could concern about 800-900 million persons, according to the international statistics that are usually disseminated, including those of the United Nations. But by adopting a broad definition of *access to water* – regular, continuous access to drinking water that is economically, legally and truly accessible and acceptable from the viewpoint of usability – the reality described by some studies is even more worrying: 1.9 billion people have only unhealthy water at their disposal, while 3.4 billion periodically use water of unsafe quality. In short, according to the latest statistics, access to drinking water cannot be guaranteed for about half of the world's population.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cf. UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation*, A/HRC/18/L.1, 23 September 2011.

¹⁶ With the resulting decrease in the time available for other fundamental activities like education and work.

¹⁷ For example, water pumped for industrial and agricultural use.

¹⁸ All too telling is the work of health educators in developing countries who go about explaining to the people that running water or water delivered in tanker trucks is not necessarily drinkable, despite the fact that it is supplied by local public authorities or private firms.

¹⁹ Cf. GERARD PAYEN *Les besoins en eau potable dans le monde sont sous-estimés : des milliards de personnes sont concernées* in AA.VV. *Implementing the right to drinking water and sanitation in Europe*, Académie de l'Eau, France 2011, p. 26.

A complex geographical distribution

Most of the people with no regular access to drinking water – 84% according to the World Health Organization²⁰ – live in rural areas or places where the supply of drinking water is limited. In those areas, various factors – such as the distance of some communities and the cost of infrastructures – make a rapid and clear improvement of the situation unlikely.

In urban areas too, there are difficult problems. Millions of people have unhealthy running water simply because they live in places where large investments in infrastructure and technology would be required to *make running water drinkable*.

This geographical distribution of *the thirsty* – as those with no regular access to water could be defined – makes the situation especially worrying because progress will probably be slow and costly. In some of the world's urban areas, moreover, there is a great imbalance between population growth and increase in water infrastructures.

2. The delay in providing sanitation

Progress in the sanitation sector appears to be insufficient. More than a billion people do not have access to any kind of sanitation²¹ and the current trends seem to forecast slow progress in this area.

This phenomenon is especially worrying because sanitation, like purification, has an essential role in the processes of reusing water and countering possible dangers for human health caused by polluted or stagnant water. The absence of sanitation and adequate purification systems is a serious threat to the environment, especially in large, densely populated cities because large quantities of polluted water are poured back into the environment in a limited space.

3. The dangers of a commercial perspective

The rules and negotiations of international trade ought to aim at the good of all, in particular of the poor and vulnerable, and should guarantee the means for human subsistence.²² The fact that water is essential for human life, a gift of God,²³ compels us to consider it differently from other commodities.

Unfortunately, from a practical standpoint, an overly commercial concept of water sometimes persists with the risk of mistakenly considering it like any other commodity and planning investments according to the criteria of profit for profit's sake, without taking the public value of water into consideration.

Overly commercial viewpoints and behaviour can lead to planning investments for infrastructures only in areas where it seems remunerative to make them: that is, where it seems profitable, where large numbers of people live. There is the risk of failing to see one's brothers and sisters as human beings with the right to a dignified existence and of considering them merely as customers. Such a commercial approach leads in some cases to creating an unnecessary dependence (on networks, procedures, bureaucracies, patents) and tends to make water available only to those who can pay for it. Another limit of the commercial approach in managing water (and other natural resources) is that of only taking care of and safeguarding the environment by the assumption of one's responsibilities if and when it is economically expedient to do so.

²⁰ Cf. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, *World health statistics 2011*, p. 18.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

²² Cf. *Statement of the Holy See at the World Trade Organization Council on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights*, Geneva, 8 June 2010.

²³ No one can take *credit* for water in the sense that no one is at its origin.

4. A right to protect and promote

Once a right is recognized, it has to be protected and promoted with a special legal framework and adequate institutions that will define responsibilities clearly, establish under what circumstances the right is not guaranteed, and protest and ask for reparations if this right is not respected.

Some countries have included the right to water in their internal legislative system by specifying criteria of quality and quantity and establishing the structures responsible for its implementation. This is important because, within its borders, the State is responsible for guaranteeing people's rights and welfare as well as for the correct management of natural resources.

Unfortunately, not all States include the right to water in their national legal system. Some States tolerate or even undertake actions that are directly or indirectly harmful to the right of the communities of bordering States, or they even use water as an instrument of political or economic pressure.

On the other hand, on the international level, after this important right has been recognized, the inadequacy of the "complex of institutions that give [juridical] structure"²⁴ to rights and are meant to guarantee them – is all the more remarkable. The need to improve and reinforce the existing international institutions "seems obvious if we consider the fact that the agenda of questions to be dealt with globally is becoming ever longer,"²⁵ and that some problems are no longer manageable by a single State. This is all the more valid for water which, by its nature, flows both above and below ground regardless of man-made borders. In addition to the lack of institutions, "there is still in fact much hesitation in the international community about the obligation to respect and implement human rights."²⁶

III. THE SPREAD OF A NECESSARY INTEGRATED AND MULTILEVEL VIEW IN THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS BACKED BY SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURES

The Holy See appreciates that it is not possible to seek and much less find and apply solutions to the question of water by considering it independently of other problems linked to development or by focusing on only one level of intervention. In these past years, there have been encouraging developments in these sectors. The appearance of some multinational or international structures, although they do need to be strengthened, reflects the international community's growing awareness of the need for them.

Water in a global approach to development

It is now common knowledge that the question of water cannot be analyzed or a solution attempted in an isolated way without linking it to other, interrelated social, economical and environmental themes.²⁷ It is commonly associated with questions of hunger and malnutrition, the economy and finance, energy, the environment in a broad sense, production and industry, hygiene, agriculture, urbanization, natural disasters, and "drought ... and rising water levels".²⁸ Due to the marked interdependence of these issues, they have to be tackled together for the sake of true integral and sustainable development.

²⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, No. 7.

²⁵ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Towards reforming the international financial and monetary systems in the context of global public authority*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2011, p. 20.

²⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXXVI World Day of Peace (1 January 2003)*, No. 5.

²⁷ Cf. UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL'S HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: a Future Worth Choosing*, 30 January 2012, p. 6.

²⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address for the Welcoming Celebration by the Young People*, Apostolic Journey to Sydney, 17 July 2008.

The different levels of analysis

To interpret and tackle the above-mentioned problems adequately, interdisciplinary analysis is of necessity used on various levels. The global and local levels should be taken into proper consideration, and likewise the regional and national structure, as required by the principle of subsidiarity.

International aquifers, transnational rivers and lakes, and the activities that potentially affect the availability of water in another State naturally constitute a supranational public issue. Crisis prevention and management in areas of tension also calls for analysis on various levels because national decisions can have repercussions on local situations, just as possible local conflicts can create instability on a regional level. The possibility of cooperation between local and global realities – to pursue projects, spread good practices and target investments – also calls for analysis on various levels.

New intergovernmental structures are still insufficient

The Holy See appreciates the creation within the United Nations, or in regional intergovernmental structures, of consultation groups or coordinating organizations especially dedicated to the questions of water. This trend, which began in the first years of the millennium, shows the growing attention given to the “public good” which is water. Nonetheless, for the fair management of water on the international level, further institutional advances still need to be made.

IV. GROWING DEMAND

The reasons

In the future, there will be growing demand for water worldwide because the global population is increasing.

Independently of this population increase, the standards of living and consumption in various countries are rising. The demand for water and energy is growing, often for non-essential purposes and in the production of consumer goods that are not always necessary. In this regard, “the squandering of the world’s ... resources in order to fuel an insatiable consumption”²⁹ and the “accumulation of goods ... reserved to a small number and proposed as models to the masses” are of particular concern.³⁰

Resources in jeopardy

Despite increasing demand, however, water is in short supply and the “concerns regarding the ever decreasing availability of water” are manifest.³¹ Water resources are also jeopardized by activities directly attributable to poor management: that is, the pollution that acts at different levels in the water cycle, and excessive pumping that does not take into due consideration the time needed for water resources to be replenished. Also weighing heavily on this are the losses caused by poorly planned or poorly managed installations and the waste due to irresponsible consumption.

Global warming in some areas particularly affected by climate change is reducing available resources. This phenomenon will probably strike and be felt more in areas that have little water and are inhabited by vulnerable populations. Millions of people³² could lack water to quench their thirst, and their agricultural production – which depends above all on the abundance or lack of rainfall – could be endangered.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the New Ambassadors at the Presentation of the Letters accrediting them to the Holy See*, 17 December 2009.

³¹ *Intervention by the Holy See at the 37th Session of the Conference of FAO*, 28 June 2011.

³² The Synthesis Report *Climate Change 2007* of the INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC) even estimates that an additional 75-250 million people in Africa will undergo *water stress* by 2020 because of climate change.

Some countries, moreover, have overused the available water resources, endangering reserves and exceeding the limits of sustainability.³³ Therefore, the security and sustainability of water resources continues to be an issue requiring urgent attention.³⁴

³³ Cf. UNITED NATIONS, *UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2011*, p. 52.

³⁴ Cf. UNITED NATIONS, *UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2010*, p. 4.

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

We find ourselves, therefore, in a context where the right to water has been recognized internationally, but progress in its implementation, in the various development contexts, is slow.

In view of this challenge, it is more and more necessary for the international community to put forward sustainable solutions and for these to be applied effectively on different levels.

I. THE NEED FOR IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS

The Holy See stresses the urgency of the problem and hopes that the search for solutions under way in the international community will not merely be expressed in statements of intent, even if they are backed up by abundant studies. In planning middle- and long-term sustainable economies, it is important not to neglect the thorny issues for which it is difficult to find a unanimous consensus but which, in any case, call for careful attention and urgent, effective action aimed at protecting human dignity and the lives of millions of people.

“Where human lives are concerned, time is always short: yet the world has witnessed the vast resources that governments can draw upon to rescue financial institutions deemed ‘too big to fail’. Surely the integral human development of the world’s peoples is no less important: here is an enterprise, worthy of the world’s attention”.³⁵

II. STRUCTURES AND GOVERNANCE

With reference to various supranational problems, including those of the environment and water, the need for international governance emerges.³⁶ Such governance should not be seen as a higher principle that oppresses local or State initiatives, but rather as a necessary coordination and orientation for an enhancement and a harmonious, sustainable use of the environment and natural resources for the sake of the *global common good*.

The task of governance

What is needed is a network of institutions that will guarantee everyone everywhere a regular and sufficient access to water,³⁷ so as to remedy the *deficits* already pointed out: by indicating qualitative and quantitative *standards*, by offering criteria that will help to promote national legislation compatible with the internationally recognized right to water, and by monitoring the extent to which States respect their commitments.

One important task is favouring various forms of cooperation: scientific cooperation and the transfer of technologies, as well as administrative and managerial cooperation. Also necessary are common control measures against corruption and pollution, and likewise for the prevention and management of conflicts. Particularly to be encouraged is the creation of authorities on the regional and cross-border levels competent for a joint, integrated, fair and rational management of shared resources in solidarity.

Governance, moreover, should guarantee the primacy of politics – which is responsible for the common good – over economy and finance. The latter “need to be brought back within the boundaries of their real vocation and function ... in consideration of their obvious responsibilities” regarding the environment, the public good which is water, and society, in order to give life to “markets and financial institutions which are

³⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the meeting with representatives of British society in Westminster Hall*, Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom, 17 September 2010.

³⁶ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, No. 67.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, No. 27.

really at the service of the person and are capable of responding to the needs of the common good and universal brotherhood,”³⁸ and are not motivated merely by profit for profit’s sake.

The rationale for governance: to ensure the universal destination of goods

Humanity has received from God the mission to care for and manage wisely the environment, water and other resources; these are “common goods” and, as such, contribute to the “global common good” for whose realization suitable institutions are essential. These institutions should take it upon themselves to guarantee the universal destination of goods on the global level. In fact, the social doctrine of the Church bases the ethics of property relations regarding the goods of the earth on the biblical perspective which points to creation as God’s gift to all human beings: “God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner. Whatever the forms of property may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of peoples, according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods. In using them, therefore, man should regard the external things that he legitimately possesses not only as his own but also as common in the sense that they should be able to benefit not only him but also others”.³⁹

The right to use earthly goods, including water, is a natural, inviolable right with universal value inasmuch as it is due to every human being. It must be protected and made effective through appropriate laws and institutions.⁴⁰

III. NEW POLICIES

1. Water policies

Promotion of the common good – whose conditions for attainment today include the protection and promotion of the right to water – is a “duty of the civil authorities”.⁴¹ Therefore, policies are needed that will protect this good in today’s circumstances. In this regard, the Holy See is aware that situations vary greatly. This makes it necessary to plan policies that are valid and effective for the different contexts.

Private enterprise

Given that public authorities have the task of setting norms and controls, in the case of private enterprise in the water sector, it must be admitted that it is impossible to establish universal rules or norms for private-public cooperation. While it is understandable and reasonable for private actors to tend to develop remunerative activities, they should not forget that water has a social value and must be accessible to everyone. In this regard, the authority must guarantee through adequate legislation that water maintains its universal destination, “giving special attention to the most vulnerable sectors of society”.⁴² The private sector has an essential role in pursuing the development and management of various natural resources and so they should not be excluded *a priori*. However, they must not behave as if water were merely a commercial

³⁸ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Towards reforming the international financial and monetary systems in the context of global public authority*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2011, p. 33.

³⁹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 69.

⁴⁰ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Towards a better distribution of land*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, No. 28.

⁴¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the meeting with representatives of British society in Westminster Hall*, Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom, 17 September 2010.

⁴² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXIII World Day of Peace (1 January 1990)*, No. 9.

good and not a public good. Therefore, they should be steered to follow virtuous practices: that is, management of distribution services of water in conformity with the demands of the common good.

Public policies

Courageous policies should be promoted that are conceived with farsightedness and not influenced by particular interests or enacted in an opportunistic way to obtain electoral success. Regarding water, the world of politics should act in a responsible way and renounce immediate economic interests or ideologies that end up degrading human dignity. Positive law must be founded on the principles of natural moral law in order to guarantee respect for the dignity and value of the human person⁴³ which can be undermined if the right to water is not guaranteed and promoted. Therefore, laws and structures are needed at the service of the right to water. But, above all, upright people are needed: that is, people who have a great sensitivity for the common good and the particular public good which is water.

2. Policies based on solidarity

Policies ought to be an expression of inter-generational and infra-generational solidarity in the sense of love for the common good, and generous, unanimous and systematic dedication to it, according to the historical contexts. Therefore, they should be formulated bearing in mind the concrete conditions for their achievement, among which the need stands out today for everyone to have access to the “good” which is water.

The Holy See reaffirms the urgent moral need for a new solidarity⁴⁴ with regard to natural resources, the management of the environment and, in particular, to water, according to an international dimension that includes the poorest countries and implies skilful management of the planet’s resources. Moreover, it points out that “to turn this solidarity into effective action calls for fresh thinking that will improve life conditions in many important areas,”⁴⁵ in addition to ethically based decisions. Without real solidarity, financial mechanisms cannot be conceived or policies planned that help to satisfy the right to water. Solidarity, in fact, is a virtue of an ethical nature that favours a dignified life for all and allows access to fundamental goods. If human dignity is compromised, then reforms of structures, governance itself, and the moral direction offered by great principles are made fruitless.

3. The commitment of civil society

On this occasion, the Holy See does not forget that the management of water is of concern not only to certain technicians, politicians and administrators: it is, and must remain, a concern of everyone, of the whole of civil society. The latter avails itself in particular of the political community’s help in order to achieve its ends. This does not mean, however, that civil society can be replaced in its primary responsibility. The political community is at the service of civil society’s ends and receives from it the task of producing all the policies and institutions necessary for the common good.⁴⁶ The political authority carries out its task well if, in protecting and promoting the right to water, it gives value to civil society’s contribution and urges it to organize itself accordingly. The correct way to manage the public “good” of water is according to solidarity and subsidiarity. Civil society holds the ultimate responsibility, and so when the political community does not appear capable of carrying out its task, civil society ought to mobilize to bring it about.

⁴³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the XLIV World Day of Peace (1 January 2011)*, No. 12.

⁴⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXIII World Day of Peace (1 January 1990)*, No. 10.

⁴⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the meeting with representatives of British society in Westminster Hall, Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom, 17 September 2010*.

⁴⁶ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes*, No. 74.

IV. MODERATION AND JUSTICE

In a society that pursues the goal of sustainable and inclusive development, all are called to live with moderation and justice.⁴⁷

Moderation in consumption

Some societies have the possibility and the habit of consuming, for a variety of more or less essential purposes, several times more water per day than the amount indispensable for a dignified life, which other societies tragically do not have. This inequality in access to and consumption of water can hardly be approved.

Nor can societies be praised that consume water for superfluous purposes in an increasingly unbridled consumerism aimed at the unlimited accumulation of goods,⁴⁸ because these are practices contrary to sustainable development.

It cannot be claimed, by way of excuse, that the consumption or saving of water in a given place, especially in a developed country, has no consequences elsewhere, especially in developing countries. Water is part of a worldwide system, and even if there were no direct connection between consumption and availability in two different places, other indirect connections exist that must be kept in mind: to transport, purify and consume water costs and requires energy. The amounts required could be spent in a more useful way by helping the very poor. Also, it should not be forgotten that this energy is sometimes taken from regions that need it more.

The Holy See, therefore, reaffirms the importance of moderation in consumption and invokes the responsibility of administrations, businesses and individual citizens. Such moderation is supported by values such as altruism, solidarity and justice.

The principle of justice

The principle of justice in its commutative, contributory and distributive aspects, that is, as social justice, ought to inspire solutions to the issue of water.

This same principle, for example, should guide the equitable distribution of the investments necessary for development and should promote the implementation of the right to water. Developing countries and emerging economies should contribute to these investments in proportion to their means and in this way align themselves with the traditional donor States. The international community, for its part, is called to adopt innovative ways of financing. These could include the capital obtained from a possible tax on financial transactions.

The principle of justice, moreover, should help to identify the damage done to the “good” of water and to propose possible remedies or sanctions. For this purpose, courts of justice, equipped to hear the pleas of those whose right to water is not guaranteed, may be useful.

Likewise, this principle guides the fair distribution of water. In this regard, the Holy See stresses that there are minimum levels for a dignified existence, although they are not guaranteed in many developing countries, and these ought to be met as a priority, especially in the light of high levels of consumption typical of more developed countries.

For the Holy See, moreover, justice, in harmony with the principle of subsidiarity, must operate on all levels: from local to cross-border, from national to regional, from continental to international levels. Like solidarity, it has to be inter-generational and infra-generational.

The principle of justice, since it must safeguard the rights of all, and especially of the weakest, emphasizes that forced birth control policies imposed on the weakest are unjust. Such policies force the

⁴⁷ Cf. *Tit* 2:12.

⁴⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the New Ambassadors at the Presentation of the Letters accrediting them to the Holy See*, 17 December 2009.

poorest communities to check their demographic growth in order to allow other societies to maintain their excessive levels of consumption.

CONCLUSION

Billions of people are still without water in sufficient quantity or quality for a dignified, secure and comfortable life. Confident in the sense of responsibility of the various actors involved in the management of water, the Holy See wishes to share its viewpoint with Governments and all people of good will. By recalling the duty of solidarity, it hopes that the commitments made will be respected and that sustainable solutions will be adopted with urgency and with particular attention to the most vulnerable and to future generations. In this way the forthcoming major international events will be able to propose solutions that are just and sustainable for the environment, supported by innovative mechanisms that will guarantee them respect and rapid implementation. It should not be overlooked that in the implementation of the right to water, there is a telling gap between the funds considered necessary and those that are effectively mobilized.

All too frequently water is the object of pollution, waste and speculation. It is increasingly fought over and is a well-known cause of ongoing conflicts. Instead, it ought to be treated as a universal good, indispensable for the integral development of peoples and for peace.