



16th World Trade Union Congress, 6-9 April 2011, Athens, Greece  
Proposals of the FTE of MEXICO

## 18. Water and workers

**ABSTRACT:** Water as a natural resource is seriously threatened in the world. The management of this resource is essential, it is the vital energy. Water privatization, commoditization and irrational use should be prevented and reversed. The water implies a social right.

### 1. Introduction

35% of the population lives in poor water supply and sanitation, and it is expected that by 2025 this figure will double.

40% of available water is concentrated in six countries, while others that occupy 40% of the land surface have only 2% of total water.

Phenomena such as desertification, salinization, loss of soil and plant and animal biodiversity, drought, rising temperature, food insecurity, poverty, disease and death, among others, are associated with lack of quantity and quality of water.

### 2- Development

The information about water is poor and the statistics are uncertain. According to the report 3 on the World Water Development Report (WWDR-March 2009) of the United Nations Organization (UNO), the global water use is estimated at 40,000 cubic kilometers ( $\text{km}^3$ ) per year. Other 6,400  $\text{km}^3$  of rain water is used in agriculture. It is estimated that 70,000  $\text{km}^3$  of water evaporates from the forests, natural vegetation and wetlands. Evaporation from human activities is estimated at 200  $\text{km}^3$ .

The 10 largest users of water (by volume) are India, China, USA, Pakistan, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh,

Mexico and Russia. The level of water usage is of 646  $\text{km}^3$  per year in India, and less than 30 million cubic meters in some regions of Africa.

The water withdrawal per person ranges from 20  $\text{m}^3$  in Uganda to more than 5,000  $\text{m}^3$  in Turkmenistan, with a global average of 600  $\text{m}^3$ . By sector, the increased water consumption is that in agriculture, industry and domestic consumption. Irrigated agriculture accounts for over 70% of the water withdrawn, industry (including energy) 20% and household consumption 10%. The use of water for hydroelectric and thermal cooling is on the rise.

In 2000, renewable water resources are estimated at 43,659  $\text{km}^3$ /year, with a total water withdrawal of 3,829  $\text{km}^3$ /year. The 20.5% of renewable resources were extracted from Asia and the 14% while the 8.4% were extracted from North America.

Nearly 4,000  $\text{km}^3$  of water for irrigation, households, industry and energy obtained come from renewable sources, both surface (73.4%) and groundwater (18.3%). Less than 1% comes from non-renewable aquifers. Nearly 20% of total water comes from underground sources.

For use as drinking water, 48.2% comes from surface water and groundwater 45.67%. In the case of agriculture, 71% comes

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from surface waters and in the industry and energy, 87.3%.

UNO data indicate that in 2006, 54% of the world population had piped water in their homes and 13.6% (884 million) had improvised water sources. Also, 2,400 billion people lacked sanitation with increasing water pollution problems with arsenic and fluoride.

Since the 1990s, water services and sanitation have been severe part of the privatization process. This has involved the formation of thousands of private companies, subsidiaries of multinationals.

In the past 50 years, the extraction of water has tripled the demand for food. Agriculture accounts for more than 70% of fresh water taken from rivers, lakes and aquifers.

The production of bio-ethanol or biodiesel, affects agriculture. Currently, 10% of the total supply comes from traditional biomass (wood, dung, crop residues). In the "modern" bio-energy, two thirds are produced from plants and organic waste. The production of bio-ethanol from sugar cane, maize, sugar beet and sorghum has tripled between 2000 and 2007.

Brazil (sugar cane) and the U.S. (corn) provide 77% of the global total. The production of biodiesel derived from sunflower, beans, oil palm, coconut or jatropha has increased, 67% been produced by the European Union.

In 2007, 23% of corn production in the United States and 54% of the sugar cane crop in Brazil was used to produce bio-ethanol. The European Union 47% of vegetable oil was used in the production of biodiesel. It is projected to increase ethanol production in the United States, Brazil, European Union and China.

However, the potential global production of bio-fuels is limited by the availability of land and water. The impact on fresh water sources is higher in irrigated

agriculture. Irrigation water for the production of biodiesel represents an average of 2,500 liters of water (in some places up to 3,500 liters) to produce 1 (one) liter of liquid bio-fuel, to produce the same amount every day the food of a person.

Water and energy production are linked. Energy production requires water for cooling thermoelectric (nuclear and conventional), hydropower, mining and fuel production.

Hydropower provides 20% of global electricity, with major facilities in Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, USA, Australia and New Zealand.

## 3- Conclusions

The volume of water available is less than 50% of which was a hundred years ago. The crisis will double by 2025 by growing demand for water by agriculture, industry and human consumption, wasteful water use and low efficiency and sustained increase in pollution.

In southern countries the crisis is now responsible for 80% of the disease, 70% of medical consultations, 65% of placements in hospitals, the death of one child every ten seconds and ten million people each year (half were under 18 years of age).

## PROPOSALS

The FTE of Mexico presents to the 16th World Trade Union Congress the following proposals:

- 1- The WFTU calls the world's workers to fight for the defense of all water sources. Water is a social right of humanity.
- 2- The WFTU calls for struggle against privatization of water as well as the production of agro-fuels.

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