

Declaration of the Plenary X Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network

“Struggles over Water: Intersections of Class, Gender and Ethnicity”

Qualitative and structural inequalities constitute one of the major obstacles to the advance of **democratization processes**, particularly **class, gender and ethnic** inequalities, among other. In the case of water Politics and management, these inequalities are diverse, from the **unequal and unjust access** to water for essential human uses and the prevalence of **undemocratic or straightforwardly authoritarian and exclusionary forms** characterizing the government and management of water, to the **asymmetric impacts** of water-related **disasters**, such as those caused by extreme climatic events or by the inadequate, often criminal, management of infrastructures that pose high risks for the population and life more generally, like the cases behind the recent grave accidents caused with mining tailing dams in Brazil, to give an example. Although these inequalities are commonplace worldwide, the main people affected belong to the **most vulnerable social sectors**, a situation also present in the wealthiest countries and in the most established democracies.

These inequalities and their consequences, such as **poverty**, the **deterioration of living standards** and the **exclusion** of large social sectors are the cause of many **conflicts**, that often lead communities and other social actors to **organize themselves in defence of their living conditions and territories**. The ensuing **struggles** are heterogenous and multidimensional, and involve from peaceful mobilizations to claim rights and demand the protection of the authorities, denunciations against abuses committed by governments and private companies, campaigns to **promote awareness** in the populations about water-related inequalities and injustices and the **adoption of public policies and interventions** to eradicate, or at least to reduce, the impact of these inequalities and injustices, to the violent confrontation in defence of territories, waters and life. It is important to highlight that a fundamental dimension in the struggle against structural inequalities in relation to water Politics and management is related to the **production and circulation of knowledge**, in particular scientific knowledge. Too often, governments and other actors that monopolize social, economic and political power manage to redirect the production of knowledge subordinating it to the service of the increasing **monopolization** of water sources and water-based services, among other issues, by a relatively minuscule group of global corporate interests. This is done through several methods including the control of funding and the orientation of scientific policies in ways that are functional to those interests, but also by means of coercion and intimidatory and repressive practices against academic communities,



which are often demonized for producing critical knowledge oriented to **expose, denounce and confront** the structural inequalities connected with the Politics and management of water. With increasing frequency, governments and private corporations, such as the large mining, hydroelectric or agribusiness companies, have been involved in the **brutal repression**, including **assassinations, violent displacement of populations**, and other **criminal** actions applied against actors that struggle for the democratization of water Politics and management, from indigenous and peasant communities or social movements of the affected sectors, to members of the **academic communities committed to the production of critical knowledge and political action** to confront these processes. In Latin America, these forms of **criminal violence** against those who defend the **right to water and life** take place throughout the continent, reaching extremes in some countries like Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico or Paraguay, but also in other countries like Argentina, Chile or Ecuador.

The deepening and exacerbation of **structural inequalities** in relation to water Politics and management constitute one of the most important **obstacles** that negatively affect the advance of the **processes of substantive democratization** worldwide and that have a particularly extreme expression in the territories of Latin America. The rise to power of **right wing and extreme right wing groups** in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia or Ecuador, that in some cases like Brazil openly defend **criminal policies** directed to the more vulnerable and excluded sectors and against those actors that take a critical position in relation to these processes, has **greatly aggravated** the existing situation and threatens to **accelerate and amplify** the destruction of the essential conditions of life for millions of people and the destruction of the material basis of life, including water sources. Regrettably, the existence of **progressive governments** in the region, for example in Bolivia and Uruguay, more recently in Mexico and possibly in Argentina from early 2020, **does not guarantee** that the advance and deepening of **structural inequalities** in relation to water Politics and management be reduced, not to say eradicated. On the contrary, progressive governments regrettably also too often contribute to **worsen these inequalities**, reproducing the dynamics driven by the processes of monopolistic capitalist accumulation grounded on the **expansion of extractivism on large scale**.

Special section about water struggles in Chile

The organization of this X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT in Chile has special importance given that the country is experiencing a **hydrological and climatic crisis** largely provoked by the **neoliberal model of water Politics and management**, that privatized the access to water and to essential water and sanitation services and promoted the **dispossession of water and territory** by means of multiple **extractivist projects**. We consider that deepening **social dialogue** and **scientific x-disciplinary research** is fundamental to reverse the neoliberal experiment imposed on Chilean society and nature. We also express our **solidarity** in particular with the **struggles of rural communities, the Mapuche People-Nation, the socio-environmental organizations and the academics committed** with the

resistance and with opening new ways of conceiving and relating to water and ecosystems. Above all, in current times, when the defenders of water, life and territory has been systematically **criminalized and repressed by the Chilean State and the extractive companies.**

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Declaration of the Mapuche People-Nation present at the X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network.

From the **cosmovision of the Mapuche People-Nation** we emphasise that **water is not a private good**. It is a **living being with a specific spirit according of its territory of belonging**, and therefore the system of **inequalities** described in this meeting constitutes a practice of extermination of rivers, lakes, lagoons, and wetlands, and a **structural violence** that attacks criminally and systematically the life of **Ngen ko** or Spirit of Water.

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Declaration of women organizations in defence of water and life in Chilean territories.

We denounce those who are systematically destroying our natural goods because of the neoliberal capitalist power imposed on our people with blood and fire. This power is today incarnated by national capital owners, as the families Angelini, Luksic, Walker, Piñera and others, as well as transnational capitals, which have legalized extractivism and limitless pillage of our common goods. Thus, we reinforce our commitment with to recover common goods like water, promoting forms of organization and articulation across the country and through diverse strategies inspired in the collective practices of *buen vivir* and in the acknowledgement of human rights and nature's rights.

Women in Areas of Sacrifice in Resistance, from Puchuncaví and Quintero, the Workers Union of Algueras de Coronel, the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (Anamuri), Coordinators Chorera and Territorial Coordinator Hualpen.

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In view of the previous considerations, the participants in the plenary of the X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network, we demand

- that governments and international “development” and financial institutions **modify radically** their promotion of and support for the apparently limitless and often unregulated, or poorly regulated, if not illegal and even criminal expansion of **extractivist activities** (agribusinesses, large-scale mining, and related activities such as the construction of water infrastructures) that have large-scale impacts, often irreversible, that affect water sources, human populations and life in general;
- that governments and international institutions stop immediately their direct or indirect support for the politics of **commodification** or **privatization** of water sources and essential water sources and the **monopolization** of the control of water sources in the hands of multinational companies and other corporate actors. **We require** a radical change in these policies, which must be redirected to the promotion and support of the **public and community management of water**, with adequate funding, policies that promote the development of public and community services oriented at giving priority to the satisfaction of the essential needs and **water security** of human populations and living beings in general;
- that governments immediately stop the use of **repressive policies, often lethal**, that are part of the **criminalization** of the activities carried out by the affected sectors, indigenous and peasant communities, workers unions, social movements, among others, which act in **defence of water, territories and life more generally**. **We demand** that governments and international institutions abandon their defence of national and transnational corporate interests, which represent a minuscule group of privileged sectors in our societies. Governments have the **duty to defend their populations** from the impacts caused by structural inequalities and **guarantee the enjoyment of the basic conditions** that make life possible in the planet. **We demand the immediate liberation** of people in prison who have been jailed for defending their rights, their territories and their waters. We consider that that prison and repression, including torture and assassination of those who defend their territories and waters constitute a **crime against humanity** and an intolerable violation of the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples.
- that governments and international institutions **radically change their policies** that seek to direct the production of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, to promote and support the processes of accumulation and monopolization of natural goods and water in particular in the hands of corporate sectors, private companies, and individuals that control the largest part of the wealth of the planet. **We demand the redirection of these policies**, as it is urgent that the production of knowledge be focused on confronting structural inequalities and promoting the advance and deepening of the **processes of substantive democratization** in our societies. Governments and international institutions must **support the production of knowledge oriented to the defence of water** as a common good, a public and



community good, a human and transpecific universal right, giving priority to the preservation of life.

- In relation to the debate about “climate change”, we highlight the need to centre the attention on the anthropogenic processes of **global warming**, whose origins can be traced back to the colonial expansion of Northern countries and the development of global capitalism. We emphasise the fundamental role of water in the transmission of the increasingly negative impacts of global warming as well as a vital element to foster **non-mercantile, community based, en ecologically sustainable solutions** of mitigation and adaptation to climate change. In this regard, we see the forthcoming 25th UN Climate Change Conference (COP 25) in Chile, in December 2019, as an opportunity for **the necessary reinforcements of the commitments of all societies and peoples**, in particular those that have the greatest responsibility in the generation of the global climatic debt, **that includes concrete agreements to overcome the neoliberal models of water Politics and management and a clear commitment with the most vulnerable communities.**
- Finally, we want to **express our solidarity with the people of Ecuador** given the circumstances they confront while we discuss and approve this Declaration. The country is going through a **grave social, political and institutional crisis**, whereby a series of reforms introduced by the government of President Lenín Boltaire Moreno Garcés, in compliance with an **agreement signed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)** in early 2019, have prompted the mobilization of indigenous communities and other social sectors that have repudiated these reforms and demand their cancellation. On Thursday 3 October, just before the start of our X Meeting, the Ecuadorian government declared the State of Exception for 60 days and mobilized the army and the national police in a wave of harsh repression against the manifestations, which **included the assassination of people. We support the Ecuadorian people** in their struggle to defend their basic rights and **demand that the government abandons its exclusionary, neoliberal policies, and stops its activities of repression against the mobilized population.**

Plenary of the X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network, University of Concepción, Concepción, Bío-Bío, Chile, 11 October 2019.



Declaration of the Uruguayan participants at the X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network



To all defenders of water as common good, as fundamental human right, and not as a commodity, from Uruguay's National Commission in Defence of Water and Life (CNDAV, its acronym in Spanish) we thank the opportunity to be part of this meeting where we have learned and shared experiences of struggle that reaffirm our conviction that a better world is possible.

We wish to say that our struggle started in the 1990s when the privatization of our public water and sanitation services started. To reverse that situation. Social organizations, neighbours, jointly with the workers union of the water and sanitation utility OSE (FFOSE), we created the CNDAV in 2002 with the objective to stop and reverse the privatization.

Simultaneously with the 2004 national elections, the first time that Uruguay got a progressive government, we had a binding constitutional plebiscite in defence of publicly delivered water and sanitation services. The plebiscite was won with 64.7 percent of the votes. In the text of the constitutional reform it was included that

water and sanitation are a fundamental human right and their delivery must be in public, State hands. The users and civil society will participate in all aspects of planning, management, and control of water resources; the hydrological basins are established as basic units. Water uses must be prioritized by regions, basins, or sub-basins, and the top priority is the water supply for the populations”.

Today, almost 15 years after that historical moment, a process that was taken up as a model by many social movements around the world, we must say that the constitutional mandate has been systematically violated by all governments since 2004. The neoliberal policies linked to extractivism have become the ‘Stone Guest’ under the law of protection for direct foreign investments, which allowed the establishment of the Soybean and forest agribusinesses in the country. These activities have a negative impact on soil and water sources, which in recent years have been reflected in an unprecedented explosive growth of cyanobacteria in all water courses. Therefore, although the multinational water and sanitation companies were expelled from the country by the citizens’ initiative and the



services are in public, State hands, the gamble of these governments for an economy based on export-oriented agribusinesses has allowed the installation of cellulose processing industries, and the handing over of the use of water to large capitalists actors through the passing of an irrigation law that creates a lucrative water market and violates the Constitution. Another important aspect, interrelated with the advance of this model based on primary economic activities, is the unprecedented foreignization and concentration of land ownership: 50 percent of the land is now in foreign hands. Our struggle in defence of water is linked to the defence of common goods, of land and territory against pillage. For this reason, we will persist in our struggle against any action that violates our right to life.

RIGHTS CANNOT BE PRIVATIZED OR NEGOTIATED! FOR THE DEFENCE OF TERRITORIES, WATER AND LIFE!

Carlos Sosa and Carmen Sosa, in representation of the CNDAV at the Plenary of the X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network.

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Declaration of the Brazilian participants at the X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network

In Brazil, the Federal government is promoting the **dismantling of the State's environmental institutions** by diminishing the regulatory capacity of these public entities. In the case of water management, this dismantling takes place by transferring the National Water Agency (ANA) from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Regional Development. As a result, we are witnessing the worrying increase of **deforestation in Amazonia**, and negative impacts on the **integrity of rivers and aquifers**, with the possibility of **privatization** of the control of water resources and the **weakening of the role of collegiate regulatory bodies with civil society representatives**. The Brazilian participants at the X International Meeting of the Network consider that this is a very worrying situation and **repudiate these actions, which compromise the future of the next generations, of traditional communities, and of the sociobiodiversity of the country and of Latin America.**

Brazilian participants in the Plenary of the X International Meeting of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network