

## DECLARATION OF COALITION AGAINST WATER PRIVATISATION

One of the most celebrated achievements of South Africa's transition to democracy is the Bill of Rights enshrined in the Constitution. The Bill of Rights provides that, "everyone has the right to have access to sufficient water". The privatisation of water violates that constitutional (and human) right in every way imaginable. As the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (to which the South African is signatory) explicitly acknowledges, "water is a public good fundamental for life and health ... the human right to water is indispensable for leading a life of human dignity, it is prerequisite for the realisation of other human rights". At all levels of life - political, social, economic and cultural - the privatisation of water is anti-democratic, anti-social and anti-human.

As early as 1994, the South African government introduced its policy on water in direct violation of the RDP commitment to lifeline supply. This gave the water bureaucrats the authority to provide water only if there was a full cost recovery of operating, maintenance and replacement costs. The GEAR policy in 1996 located the policies of water and other basic needs within a neo-liberal macro-economic policy framework.

Following the neo-liberal economic advice of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and various Western governments, the South African government drastically decreased grants and subsidies to local municipalities and city councils and supported the development of financial instruments for privatised delivery. This effectively forced local government to turn towards commercialisation and privatisation of basic services as a means of generating the revenue no longer provided by the national state. Many local government structures, using the enabling legislation provided by the Municipal Services Act, began to privatise public water utilities by entering into service and management 'partnerships' with multinational water corporations.

As a result of privatisation, water has ceased to be a public good that is accessible and affordable to all South Africans. Instead, water and sanitation have become market commodities to be bought and sold on a for-profit basis, notwithstanding the 'free' 6000 litres of water per month, per household that is not enough to cover basic needs. Households are charged more for every additional drop they use, in order to recoup the income foregone due to the first 6000 litres provided. Moreover, millions of the poorest South Africans do not have access to water services and thus receive no allocation of free water.

The policy of 'cost-recovery' has seen the price of water rising, necessarily hitting poor communities the hardest. Unable to pay, poor families have been cut-off from their water supplies - more than ten million by the latest count. Additionally, over 2 million have been evicted from their homes, often as a part of the associated legal process to recover debt from poor 'customers'. Those poor communities without previous access to clean water have either suffered the same fate once infrastructure was provided or have simply had to make do with sourcing water from polluted streams and far-away boreholes.

The collective impact of water privatisation on the majority of South Africans has been devastating. The desperate search for any available source of water has resulted in cholera outbreaks that have claimed the lives of hundreds. Inadequate hygiene and 'self-serve' sanitation systems have led to continuous exposure (especially for children) to various preventable diseases. There has been an increase in environmental pollution and degradation arising from uncontrolled effluent discharges and scarcity of water for food production. And, the human dignity of entire communities has been ripped apart, as the right to the most basic of human needs, water, has been turned into a restricted privilege available only to those who can afford it.

Water is a natural resource that, by its very nature, must be collectively owned and enjoyed. Privatisation, by its very nature, turns water into a commodity, owned by corporate monopolies and enjoyed only on an individualised basis. Nowhere is this monopolised and individualised hijacking of the collective, human right to water more apparent than in the latest manifestation of privatised water provision, pre-paid water metres. In the community of Phiri (Soweto) and in several other poor communities across South Africa, private water corporations (with the full backing of national and local government officials) are installing pre-paid metres as a technological tool to enforce both 'cost-recovery' and self-disconnection. Those community members and activists resisting privatised water in Phiri and in other 'guinea pig' communities have been summarily arrested. Many have been denied bail or have been placed under

apartheid-era bail conditions in order to silence their voices and to crush collective community resistance. Like the effect of the opposition from government and corporate capital to apartheid reparations, the majority of South Africans are being intimidated and/or forcibly pushed into foregoing their collective socio-economic rights, thus allowing private corporations to continue profiting from their poverty.

In light of the above, we demand that:

- ◆ The criminalisation of dissent and opposition to the privatisation of water be immediately stopped
- ◆ Pre-paid meters be immediately outlawed and removed from all communities where they have been installed
- ◆ The government reverse its policy of privatising water and all other basic needs by cancelling all 'service' contracts and 'management' agreements with private water corporations
- ◆ The government make a firm political and fiscal commitment to roll-out universally accessible infrastructure
- ◆ The government publicly affirm the human and constitutional right of all South Africans to water by ensuring full public ownership, operation and management of public utilities in order to provide free basic services for all

