THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS LE CONSEIL DES CANADIENS

May 20, 2011
Victoria Island, Ottawa

To the Water Walkers:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity and great privilege to express words of support to the wonderful women and men on this water walk. I am so sorry not to be there in person but I am in BC fighting the damage natural gas fracking is creating in First Nation communities. We recognize the long journey you're making from Maine and along the way to the hundreds of miles to Bad River, Wisconsin to honour the water.

Water really is life. It sustains us, nourishes us, cleanses us, heals us and is a part of us.

We are facing a global water crisis on many levels including the lack of drinking water on First Nation reserves, pollution and over extraction.

But I want to highlight a victory we had last year when the UN passed 2 resolutions recognizing the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation.

On July 28th, the UN General Assembly a passed a resolution recognizing the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right. 122 countries voted in favour of the resolution, no country opposed the resolution and 41 countries abstained. The countries that abstained included several wealthy Western countries including Canada and the US.

On September 30, 2010, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution recognizing the human right to water and sanitation. This second resolution recognized the right to water and sanitation as already entrenched in international law.

Catarina de Albuquerque, who is the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, noted the significance of the HRC resolution and said, "this means that for the UN, the right to water and sanitation is contained in existing human rights treaties and is therefore legally binding."

Even though the Canadian government has had a long standing position that the right to water does not exist, the right to water is now entrenched in international law and the Canadian government is obligated to respect, protect and fulfill this right.

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The Council of Canadians will be working very hard on implementing these resolutions here in Canada.

Despite how important water is to ecosystems and to humans, humans are destroying the waters that we have.

And in the Great Lakes we are seeing it abused, polluted and exploited. The waters of the Great Lakes are under threat from invasive species, different types of pollution, water withdrawals for the bottled water industry, fracking – a process of drilling deep down into the ground and injecting water, sand and chemicals to fracture shale to extract natural gas – and the radioactive steam generators that Bruce Power plans to ship through the Great Lakes to Sweden, which Bruce Power says they are now being put on hold to consult with Metis and First Nations. But the real test will come when First Nations reject the plan and it remains to be seen whether Bruce Power and the governments will listen to what people have to say.

So there are many threats to our water. And the fact that you wonderful people are bringing this awareness to the fore is so important. So we all thank you for this.

I am amazed by the strength and commitment of all of the walkers and supporters. I'm inspired by your passion and your love for the water.

Recently there was a conference in Traverse City Michigan called Saving the Great Lakes Forever. It was organized by FLOW for Water and a number of people took part. At the end of the conference a number of activists, residents and organizations declared the Great Lakes a Commons and Public Trust.

I talk about this in my new report called *Our Great Lakes Commons*. The notion that the Great Lakes is a commons and a public trust is based on the belief that the Great Lakes are to be shared, protected, carefully managed and enjoyed by all who live around them.

The idea of the commons is a very old idea and embodied in many indigenous cultures. Many indigenous societies to this day cannot conceive of denying a person or a family basic access to food, air, land, water and livelihood.

The Great Lakes need to be protected by a legal and political framework based on the *Public Trust Doctrine,* underpinning in law that the Great Lakes are central to the very existence of those people, plants and animals living on or near them and therefore must be protected for the common good from generation to generation.

This means that the Lakes could not be appropriated or subordinated for private gain. It is also our determination that the Great Lakes will be designated as a *Protected Bioregion*, recognizing that while there are many political jurisdictions governing the Great Lakes Basin, it is, in fact, one integrated watershed and needs to be seen and governed as such.

So it is our hope that First Nations and other communities will lead us in the movement that will protect and nurture our Great Lakes for all generations to come.

Thank you very much, miigwech. And I wish the walkers well as they continue their journey.

Maude Barlow

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