

For Immediate Release

October 13, 2021

Africa Water Activists Resist Corporate Privatisation as World Bank Meets

Civil society and labour activists on the platform of the *Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition* have called on African governments to reject water privatisation and demand the return of water systems seized by private corporations back to the hands of the African people to be publicly funded and equitably managed.

The coalition made the demand at today's international press conference where the report – *Africa Must Rise & Resist Water Privatisation* was launched as part of activities lined out to mark the Africa Week of Action Against Water Privatisation which began on 11 October 2021 and runs through 15 October. The week of action coincides with annual meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), institutions which the coalition found are among the biggest drivers of water privatisation in Africa.

Africa Must Rise & Resist Water Privatisation details how privatisation has become the most potent threat to Africans' human right to water and cites water privatisation failures in the United States, Chile, and France as lessons for African governments being pressured by the World Bank and a host of multilateral financial institutions to toe the privatisation path.

Activists making the demands come from Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania Uganda, representing parts of the continent currently under acute threat of water privatisation. Some of the groups are Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPP), Public Services International (PSI), Africa Center for Advocacy (ACA), Syndicat Autonomes des Travailleurs de l'Eau du Sénégal, among others.

They insist that while water remains one of the most fundamental necessities for life, giant corporations like Veolia and Suez, backed by international financial institutions like the World Bank are exploiting this basic need by trying to privatise water across the African continent, threatening to leave millions of people suffering without water.

Akinbode Oluwafemi, Executive Director of CAPP, who detailed the need for community and labour resistance to privatisation said:

“No matter where you are from on this continent, the threat of water privatisation is real. Corporations and institutions like the World Bank are trying to suck water and profits out of Africa as though they have a massive drinking straw. But Africans say no—our water, our right. We do not need international financial institutions or corporations to take care of our people”

On the impacts of water privatisation on workers in Africa and the role of labour in the movement confronting it, Dr. Everline Aketch, Sub-regional Secretary for English-Speaking Africa, PSI said:

“As labourers and citizens, we are guardians of good governance. So, the labour movement joins civil society in saying that water is life. When governments move to allow water privatisation, it means they are trying to kill our people.”

In connecting the struggle for water justice in Africa to the broader Pan-African movement for Black liberation, Dr. Melina Abdullah of Black Lives Matter Grassroots said:

"It is an African principle that people should share in and have a right to the world's resources. The idea that water could be privately owned is a white supremacist notion. Access to water should be a human right, not something held by white supremacist capitalism".

"When we say Black Lives Matter, that is not only a fight to end state sanctioned violence and police brutality against Black people. It is also about any form of injustice against Black people and people of color all over the world through capitalist policies such as privatisation of social services, including water. So, we must stand against privatization everywhere."

On their experiences fighting water privatisation and injustice in Cameroon and Senegal, as well as the power of organizing, the Africa Center for Advocacy, Cameroon, and Syndicat Autonomes des Travailleurs de l'Eau du Sénégal share insights:

Younoussa Abbosouka, Advocacy officer, ACA, Cameroun said:

"Cameroon has already weathered one storm brought about by water privatisation. Now, our government must protect us from the pressure of the World Bank, which brings strong winds blowing in favor of profits, not people. Protect Cameroon and guarantee clear skies ahead by investing in public water"

Oumar Ba, Environmental engineer, (Syndicat Autonomes des Travailleurs de l'Eau du Sénégal) insists:

"Everyone needs water to live. In Senegal, I have witnessed the impacts of water privatisation, and I know that Suez's control of our water system is a threat to the future of Senegalese people. Water must be a public resource, not a privatised commodity."

Leonard Shang-Quartey, Coordinator of the Alternative World Water Forum, Africa also exposed the World Bank's plans to ensure its privatisation plans advance unchallenged in Africa. Hear him:

"The determination of the World Bank to grab Africa's water is the reason why the World Water Council wants to hold the so-called World Water Forum in Africa in March of 2022 in Senegal, one of the few countries where public-private partnership in water is still running despite huge failures and havoc it has caused the people."

The Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition insist that government leaders must invest in public water systems that include meaningful public participation in water governance, with particular focus on the perspectives of those typically left out of decision-making processes, including but not limited to women, low-income people, and rural communities.

A position statement shared by the coalition reinforcing its opposition to water privatisation and voicing demands to governments, corporations, and institutions has been endorsed by over 100 organisations from around the world.

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SOLIDARITY STATEMENTS CAME FROM THE FOLLOWING:

Prof. Sofiri Joab-Peterside: University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

“If water is life, then, the commodification of water amounts to commodification of life. We must rise and say an emphatic ‘No’ to commodification of water in Africa. Access to water is a right and as such, African governments must respect, protect and fulfill the right to water for all Africans and making necessary investment to develop the water sector”

Anne Le Strat: Former Deputy Mayor of Paris and President of Eau de Paris

"Private management of the Paris water system by the multinationals Veolia and Suez failed to provide Parisians with the quality of service they deserve. Remunicipalization has resulted in better service with lower rates and greater public participation in governance. I stand with the African coalition 'Our Water, Our Right' which opposes the privatization of water in its own communities," says Anne Le Strat, former deputy mayor of Paris and president of Eau de Paris, who led the remunicipalization in 2009

Philip Alston: United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (2014-2020)

“Privatisation has become a mantra in Africa and beyond. But the facts, if one bothers to study them, clearly show that in most cases it is more expensive, leads to service for many fewer people, puts the service beyond the reach of democratic actors and the courts, and determinedly disadvantages low-income groups. But privatisation is heavily promoted because it is hugely profitable for the private sector and enables governments to shed the few responsibilities they previously had.”

Léo Heller: United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation (2014-2020)

“The privatisation of water and sanitation services has led to severe risks of human rights violations in cases worldwide, driven by a focus on profit maximisation and power asymmetry. States must do all they can to meet their obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights to water and sanitation, especially for historically marginalized populations. I stand in solidarity with the Our Water, Our Right Africa Coalition as they resist privatisation and advocate for a more just way forward.”

Congresswoman Gwen Moore: United States Congress

“This week, community and labor leaders across the African continent are sounding the alarm of the widespread threat of water privatization in their communities. This issue has been near and dear to my heart since I called on the World Bank, one of the largest drivers of privatization in the Global South, to end its promotion of water privatization in 2016. As the World Bank commences its annual meetings this week and governments around the world consider how to rebuild in the years to come, the work of the Our Water, Our Right Africa Coalition could not be more critical.

These organizers have seen firsthand the devastating impact that privatization has had on communities and workers around the world, and I stand with them in defense of the human right to water for all.”

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Contact Information:

Philip Jakpor, Director of Programmes Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa

+234 803 725 6939 or jakporphilip@gmail.com

Lena Greenberg, Media lead, Corporate Accountability

+1 646 620 5344 or lgreenberg@corporateaccountability.org

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Akinbode Oluwafemi, Executive Director of CAPPA, who detailed the need for community and labour resistance to privatisation said:

“No matter where you are from on this continent, the threat of water privatisation is real. Corporations and institutions like the World Bank are trying to suck water and profits out of Africa

as though they have a massive drinking straw. But Africans say no—our water, our right. We do not need international financial institutions or corporations to take care of our people”

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