

THE EVIAN CHALLENGE

A CIVIL SOCIETY CALL FOR THE EU TO WITHDRAW ITS GATS

WATER REQUESTS

JUNE 2003

The G8 meets this week on the shores of Lake Geneva, in Evian. Appropriately, the summit has identified water as one of its key themes, with talk of a ‘global plan’ to meet the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015.

Yet across the lake, in Geneva itself, EU trade negotiators are using the services negotiations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to open up other countries’ water sectors for the benefit of Europe’s private sector water industry. Under the ‘progressive liberalisation’ programme of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the EU has targeted the water sectors of 72 other WTO member countries for liberalisation – including developed, developing and least developed countries alike.

The EU has made no secret of the fact that it sees GATS as “first and foremost an instrument for the benefit of business, and not only for business in general, but for individual service companies wishing to export services or to invest and operate abroad.” Building on the EU’s attempt to include ‘water for human use’ under the category of environmental services in the current GATS negotiations, an internal memo from the European Commission to Thames Water confirmed:

One of the main objectives of the EU in the new round of negotiations is to achieve real and meaningful market access for European service providers for their exports of environmental services.

European service providers dominate the global water market. The world’s top two private sector water companies, Vivendi and Suez (both French), control 70% of all private water services between them. The third largest is Thames Water, now part of German utilities conglomerate RWE. For these companies and their smaller competitors (most also European), GATS promises access to new markets and enhanced rights.

Yet the liberalisation of water has caused grave problems in many countries, where the involvement of foreign multinationals has typically raised water tariffs far beyond the reach of poor households. Any country making GATS commitments in water would bind in such liberalisation for the future, making it effectively impossible for it to reverse the liberalisation – despite its negative impacts on the poor.

There has been massive opposition from across the world to the EU's GATS water requests. Several EU member states have criticised the requests, making charges of EU hypocrisy at a time when (quite rightly) the EU is not offering its own water distribution services for liberalisation under GATS. Even parts of the private sector water industry itself have spoken out against the inclusion of water in the GATS negotiations, and developing countries such as South Africa have called for water to be taken out of GATS altogether.

In view of the potential damage which GATS liberalisation commitments could cause to vulnerable communities worldwide, we call on the EU – and in particular its G8 members: France, Germany, Italy and the UK – to withdraw its water requests of other WTO members immediately.

We also call on the EU to withdraw its proposal to reclassify the GATS category of environmental services, by which it intends to bring 'water for human use' into the current GATS negotiations.

Signatories (May 19th 2003):

1. 11.11.11 (Coalition of the Flemish North South Movement), Belgium
2. ACME (Association pour un Contrat Mondial sur l'eau), France
3. Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network
4. Agir Ici, France
5. AIDWATCH, Australia
6. Alliance for Democracy, United States
7. Alliance of Government Workers in the Water Sector (AGWWAS), the Philippines
8. Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), the Philippines
9. Appropriate Development Panel, United Kingdom
10. Artjol, Spain
11. ASEED Europe
12. ASEED Japan
13. Asia House, Germany
14. Asia Pacific Network on Food Sovereignty (APNFS)
15. Australian Greens
16. ATTAC Austria
17. ATTAC Belgium
18. ATTAC Colombia Madre Tierra
19. ATTAC Denmark
20. ATTAC Flanders, Belgium
21. ATTAC France
22. ATTAC Italy
23. ATTAC Japan
24. ATTAC London, United Kingdom
25. ATTAC Netherlands
26. ATTAC Spain
27. ATTAC Sweden
28. ATTAC Switzerland
29. Bangladesh Krishok Federation
30. Berne Declaration, Switzerland
31. Bond Beter Leefmilieu Vlaanderen, Belgium
32. Both ENDS, Netherlands
33. Bretton Woods Project, United Kingdom
34. Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND) / Friends of the Earth, Germany

35. Buro Ver(?)antwoord, the Netherlands
36. Business Watch Indonesia
37. Campagna della Riforma della Banca Mondiale, Italy
38. Center for Encounters and Active Nonviolence, Austria
39. Center for International Studies, Managua, Nicaragua
40. Center for Environmental Public Advocacy, Slovakia
41. CETIM (Europe - Third World Center), Switzerland
42. CESTA / Friends of the Earth El Salvador
43. CIPSI (Coordinamento di Iniziative Popolari di Solidariet Internazionale), Italy
44. Citizens' Network on Essential Services, United States
45. COECOCeiba / Friends of the Earth Costa Rica
46. Coletivo de Comunicacao Acao pela Agua, Brasil
47. Colibri (Globenet3 Germany)
48. Council of Canadians, Canada
49. Comitato Italiano per il Contratto Mondiale dell'Acqua, Italy
50. Comite Social pro Vida, Cochabamba, Bolivia
51. Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida, Cochabamba, Bolivia
52. Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)
53. Development VISIONS, Pakistan
54. Dreiknigsaktion/Kath. Jungschar, Austria
55. Environmental Foundation / Friends of the Earth Sri Lanka
56. EQUATIONS (Equitable Tourism Options), India
57. FASE/REBRIP, Brasil
58. Federacin de Trabajadores Fabriles de Cochabamba, Bolivia
59. Focus on the Global South, Thailand, India and Philippines
60. Folkebevegelsen for vann som fellesgode, Norway
61. Foundation for Community Development, Mozambique
62. Franciscans OFM - Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) office, Italy
63. Freedom from Debt Coalition - Water Team, the Philippines
64. Friends of the Earth Canada
65. Friends of the Earth France
66. Friends of the Earth Slovakia
67. GATS Campaign ATTAC Germany
68. GE Free New Zealand
69. Gender and Economic Reforms in Africa, Ghana
70. GRESEA (Research group for an alternative economic strategy), Belgium
71. INFOG (Indonesian Forum on Globalization), Indonesia
72. Initiative Civilcourage, Germany
73. Initiatives de Dveloppement Stratgique, France
74. Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, United States
75. Integrated Rural Development Foundation (IRDF), Philippines
76. Inter-Congregational Environmental Working Group, Italy
77. International Committee for the Global Water Contract (Lisbon and Brussels)
78. IRENE Network on Labour and Development, the Netherlands
79. JACSES, Japan
80. JPIC Commission of the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries, Japan
81. JPIC Secretariat of the Claritian Missionaries, Italy
82. Jubilee Kansai Network, Japan
83. Jubilee Kyushu on World Debt and Poverty, Japan
84. Jubilee South
85. JustWorld International, France
86. Kenya Rainwater Association
87. KOSA Co-ordination Southern Africa, Germany
88. Le monde selon les femmes, Belgium
89. Lunaria, Italy
90. Marist Brothers of the Schools - Bureau of International Solidarity, Italy

91. Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC), Mexico
92. Milieudefensie / Friends of the Earth Netherlands
93. Monitoring Sustainability of Globalization (MSN), Malaysia
94. Movimento Grito das Aguas, Brasil
95. Municipal Services Project, South Africa and Canada
96. Mwelekeo Wa Ngo (MWENGO), Eastern and Southern Africa
97. Naturschutzbund Vorarlberg, Germany
98. Nei til EU Sandefjord, Norway
99. Norwegian Church Aid , Norway
100. L'Observatoire des transnationales, France
101. ODA Watchers, Japan
102. Organisation pour le Renforcement des Capacites de Developpement (ORCADE), Burkina Faso
103. Our Bodies Ourselves, United States
104. Oxfam International
105. Oxfam, United Kingdom
106. Oxfam-Solidarity, Belgium
107. People & Planet, United Kingdom
108. Polaris Institute, Canada
109. PROTOS, Belgium
110. Public Services International (PSI)
111. Public Citizen, United States
112. REDES / Friends of the Earth Uruguay
113. Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary - JPIC Network, USA
114. Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, India
115. Rete di Lilliput, Italy
116. SAMWU (South African Municipal Workers Union)
117. Save the Children, United Kingdom
118. School Sisters of Notre Dame, Italy
119. Shripad Dharmadhikary, Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, India
120. Social Watch
121. SOMO (Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations), the Netherlands
122. Sweetwater Alliance, Michigan, USA
123. Swiss Coalition of Development Organizations
124. Tearfund, United Kingdom
125. Transnational Institute (TNI)
126. UGD, Austria
127. La Unidad Ecologica Salvadorea (UNES), El Salvador
128. Unione degli Universitari, Italy
129. UNISON, United Kingdom
130. VODO (Flemish Platform on Sustainable Development), Belgium
131. WALHI (Indonesian Forum for Environment), Indonesia
132. War on Want, United Kingdom
133. WaterAid, United Kingdom
134. Water Pressure Group, Auckland, New Zealand
135. Water Watch Penang, Malaysia
136. Wells for India, United Kingdom
137. Weltumspannend Arbeiten, Austria
138. WEMOS, the Netherlands
139. Werkgroep Globalisering Delft-Den Haag, the Netherlands
140. WIDE (Network Women in Development Europe)
141. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Netherlands section
142. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Swedish section
143. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, United Kingdom section
144. World Development Movement, United Kingdom
145. World Economy, Ecology & Development (WEED), Germany
146. XminY Solidariteitsfonds, the Netherlands