



DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**Communiqué of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development
on the Occasion of the World Water Day
March 22nd, 2019**

Every year, the United Nations celebrate the World Water Day on March 22nd. Many institutions and organisations from different countries celebrate this event, in order to give more visibility to the many, complex, and often worrying water issues.

This year, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has decided through this Communiqué to support the celebrations that are taking place, since the theme chosen by the UN for March 22nd, 2019 is very meaningful and symbolic: “Leaving no one behind”.

We welcome with gratitude the Message that the Holy Father has addressed to the FAO for this Day, and would like to invite the Bishops’ Conferences and institutions addressing water issues to contribute to its dissemination.

The parable of the shepherd who sets on to seek for the lost sheep¹; the emphasis of evangelical teachings on the loving care for the poor, the humble, and the marginalised²; and the social implications of the Christian faith³ make us long for truly nobody to be left behind in terms of access to drinking water. In fact, it is worth using ambitious parameters: «regular, continuous access to drinking water that is economically, legally and truly accessible and acceptable from the viewpoint of usability»⁴.

Access to drinking water, as well as access to sanitization services⁵, was recognized a right by the General Assembly of the United Nations, back in 2010⁶, when for a number of years the Holy See, some countries and

¹ See the *Gospel according to Luke* 15, 4-7.

² See the *Gospel according to Mark* 10, 46-49; *according to Luke* 1, 52-53; *according to Matthew* 25, 34-40.

³ See Pope Francis, Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, chapter 4.

⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Water, An essential element for life. Designing Sustainable Solutions. An Update*, Contribution of the Holy See to the 6th World Water Forum, held in Marseille in March 2012.

⁵ The issue of access to sanitation, mainly promoted by the World Health Organization, receives less attention than access to water. Yet, it is of paramount importance for several reasons such as people’s intimacy and safety, as well as public health and pollution. Hence, it cannot be overlooked nor considered a taboo.

⁶ Resolution 64/292 dated July, 28th 2010.

several civil society organisations had already been asking for such a recognition. Since then, many States have included this right in their national legal systems, as enshrined also in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and as acknowledged in 2017 also by a judgement of the Superior Court of Justice of Brazil that has even unusually – one might say – quoted the encyclical *Laudato si'*. In line with the social teachings of previous Pontiffs, as well as with the diplomatic statements of the Holy See, indeed this encyclical of Pope Francis re-iterates that: «access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity»⁷.

It is an unquestionable duty of States – regardless of their political system, and/or their economic and technological capacity – to do their best for the entire population to truly enjoy such a right. Governments and public administrations may decide to opt for services provided by private sector agencies or associations, to contribute to the universal access to drinking water. This, however, should in no way reduce the Government's responsibility towards society at large: «public authorities have the task of settings norms and controls»⁸, and oversee the action of the actors involved in water management. At the same time, the public authority should also guarantee the respectful use of water, avoiding pollution and waste, without forgetting that it is a resource essential to life in general, and to several biomes, and not only to human existence. In the light of the principle of subsidiarity⁹, then, there is a need for local communities to be – wherever possible and relevant, and however always under due scrutiny of public authorities – able to manage their access to drinking water. This implies assessing the needs, monitoring the quality of water available, and providing for the funding and maintenance of infrastructure. The initiatives taken by the Catholic Church in this direction are many-fold in several developing countries.

The appeal “Leaving no one behind” implies a special care for the poor, the people living in rural or far away mountain areas, those who are in situations of chaotic and dangerous migration, or who have found a shelter in refugee camps; for the population whose traditional sources of water supply have been polluted or depleted owing to excessive pumping; for prisoners, orphans; for those who are stigmatized or marginalized for ethnic, cultural reasons, or due to sickness or diseases.

With reference to this, our Dicastery considers access to drinking water in schools and healthcare centres (hospitals, clinics, outpatient dispensaries), namely those owned and managed by the Catholic Church, to be a priority. We therefore encourage monitoring actions in schools and in the aforementioned healthcare centres, to promote the following:

- Access to drinking water;
- Access to sanitation (taking into account the specific situations of people with physical disabilities);

⁷ Encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, § 30.

⁸ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Water, An essential element for life. Designing Sustainable Solutions. An Update*, Contribution of the Holy See to the 6th World Water Forum, held in Marseille in March 2012.

⁹ See the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 185-189; Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, § 47 e 57.

- The state of relevant infrastructure;
- Hygiene procedures, as well as controlling and maintenance procedures for the infrastructure.

Meanwhile, measures are to be taken aimed at improving the aforementioned elements wherever needed, for example: the construction of infrastructure, the sharing of technology, the development and updating of procedures.

And this because the terrible statistics about thirst are not to be considered a fatality without remedies, whereas engineering and managerial knowledge is already there to allow for the supply of water even in the most remote areas, including on the high seas. And also because water management cannot depend upon «a utilitarian criterion of efficiency and productivity for individual profit»¹⁰, because such a view would mean considering it as any other commodity, to be provided only to those who can pay, even though they would use it for secondary goals, and to build infrastructure only in areas able to reimburse the investment cost: such a view opposes the universal destination of water.

Access to drinking water as a common good is one of the pre-conditions for the wellbeing of the entire human family¹¹. Access to water is not an end in itself, but a condition for life to flourish, in order to have «life to the full»¹².

¹⁰ *Laudato si'*, § 159.

¹¹ See the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 164-166.

¹² The *Gospel according to John* 10, 10.