

## Vatican: Water is human right, not for-profit commodity

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Clean and potable water is a human right, not a for-profit commodity dependent on market logic, said the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in a recent document.

Unfortunately, "there persists an excessively commercial conception of water which runs the risk of mistaking it for just another kind of merchandise, and making investments for the sake of profit alone, without taking into account water's worth" as a public good, it said.

"There is a risk of not seeing one's brothers and sisters as human beings possessing the right to a dignified existence, but rather seeing them as simply customers," which leads to making water and sanitation available only to those who can pay, it added.

The document, "Water, an Essential Element for Life," is an update to previous documents of the same title by the council.

The update, which focused on effective solutions to the world's water crisis, was presented at the Sixth World Water Forum being held March 12-17 in Marseille, France. The Vatican released a copy of the document March 12.

Representing the Vatican, members of the justice and peace council attended the forum along with leaders from government, private enterprises and local communities in an effort to study and develop just and sustainable policies and practices concerning the world's water resources.

While the international community has recognized access to clean and potable water as a human right, about half of the world's population still does not have guaranteed access to potable water, and more than a billion people have no access to proper sanitation, the document said.

The Vatican delegation said effective solutions were urgently needed and underlined that individual communities and nations could not solve the problems alone. Solutions required international commitment, cooperation and enforcement, it said.

It asked developed countries to contribute substantially to investments in developing nations' water needs and infrastructure through traditional aid and donor programs as well as innovative sources of financing including monies collected from "an eventual tax on financial transactions."

The Vatican also criticized corrupt or poor resource management as well as the "insatiable consumption," waste and contamination of precious water sources.

It called for equitable and sustainable development that focused on the most vulnerable and poor, saying "inequality in access and consumption of water can never be acceptable."

While policies and enforceable laws would go a long way in managing water resources more equitably for more people, the Vatican emphasized that no real change or reform could come without individuals accepting that water is a human right while embracing a lifestyle of moderation and a true sense of altruism and solidarity.

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