

Testimony of Ambassador John W. McDonald

Chairman and CEO
Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy

Co-Founder
Global Water

WATER AND SANITATION FOR HEALTH

Before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

At a hearing on “Climate Change: A Challenge for Public Health”.

April 10, 2008
Room 430, Dirksen Senate Office Building

Summary

All of the Nations of the world have agreed three times, at UN world conferences in 2000, 2002, and 2003 to reduce by half the number of people in the world without access to safe water and sanitation by the year 2015. The US Congress has risen to this challenge by passing the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act in December 2005 and December 2007, allocating \$300 million in order for the State Department to begin implementation of the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act. The State Department's response has been inadequate.

Background

In 1977 the United Nations hosted a World Conference on Water. One of the many recommendations made by the Conference was to recommend a Decade focused on drinking water and sanitation. In 1978, as a career Foreign Service Officer working on U.N. economic and social affairs, I lifted that paragraph out of the larger World Conference document and decided to make that recommendation a reality. On November 10, 1980 the United Nations General Assembly adopted my resolution unanimously and the Decade was launched (1981-1990). I was named the United States Coordinator for the Decade by the State Department in 1979.

Dr. Peter Bourne, a former White House Special Assistant to President Carter, was named United Nations Coordinator for the Decade in 1982, with the rank of Assistant Secretary General and was based in New York. The goal of the Decade was for all people in the world to have access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The Decade was very successful as it provided 1.1 billion people with access to safe water and 769 million people with access to improved sanitation.

During this period, I traveled extensively to developing nations and saw first hand the problems that unclean water causes people to endure. Nothing I had ever seen in my life prepared me for the day I landed in Africa. I saw villages where people trekked miles in the hot sun just to get clean water for the day. But even more tragic were the children I saw suffering from the lack of clean water. Many seemed to be just hours from death, and others had lost their vision to trachoma, an easily preventable disease caused by contaminated water.

Global Water

In 1982, Dr. Peter Bourne and I founded GLOBAL WATER to help save the lives of people in developing countries that are lost due to unclean water.

Global Water is based upon the belief that the lack of access to safe drinking water is the primary cause of hunger, disease and poverty throughout the world. Our program is designed to provide safe water supplies in rural villages to enable the rural poor to help themselves.

To achieve this goal, Global Water's strategy is to provide permanent solutions to a region's water needs by providing appropriate equipment (to include state-of-the-art technology) to:

- Secure, purify, store and distribute new sources of water for domestic uses and agricultural purposes and
- Drill new water wells to allow access to groundwater.

Rather than providing short-term supplies like food and bottled water that are quickly consumed, GLOBAL WATER focuses on permanent solutions to a region's water needs. A handout fills a stomach for a few hours. Global Water enables entire villages to have clean, healthy water forever in order to change their lives - forever.

Global Water is also a volunteer-based organization and therefore none of us receive a salary for what we do. All the money that is donated to Global Water goes right into water projects implemented by non-profit organizations in the developing countries, themselves (often referred to as non-governmental organizations or NGOs). Working directly with NGOs, Global Water provides funding for specific projects (either partial or total), program management assistance, and technical support with water treatment technologies and equipment.

Over the past 25 years, Global Water has developed a model called the "Rural Outreach Water Supply (ROWS) Program." This model identifies local NGOs in developing countries that are already working with rural water supply projects to help complete Global Water projects. The ROWS model has worked well for implementing projects in remote villages in many challenging developing countries.

To date, Global Water has carried out projects in Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Laos, Liberia, Nicaragua, Romania, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, Zaire, and Zimbabwe.

And yet, over one billion men, women, and children (more than four times the population of the United States and Canada combined) **do not have safe water to drink** and therefore cannot live a healthy life. Who are these people?

They are the innocent children and desperate families living in overcrowded urban ghettos, in refugee encampments, and in towns and villages too numerous to count in rural areas of developing countries.

They are unfortunate victims of drought and ever-changing environmental conditions. When drought occurs, their countryside is transformed into an arid wasteland where every living thing seems to cry out for lack of water.

They do not have enough water to grow and harvest food, enough water to keep their livestock alive, enough clean water to protect themselves and their children from hunger and disease.

Worldwide hunger problems are really water problems.

Without water, crops and livestock wither and die. People go hungry and become weak. Weakness allows disease to run its course and finally the “Quiet Killer” – hunger, takes its toll.

At this moment, many communities in over 50 countries throughout the world are suffering needlessly because water is either insufficient or polluted or may not exist at all. A sad irony is that many times there is life saving water just 100 feet away! Directly underground. So near, yet too far for people lacking the tools and knowledge to reach it.

But with technologies ranging from simple and inexpensive to state-of-the-art, Global Water is helping poor communities in developing countries find new supplies of clean, life-sustaining water. And when clean, fresh water begins to flow in a community -- a whole new life begins -- free from the

threat of food shortages and a myriad of health-related problems that are associated with hunger.

Daily, tens of thousands of men, women, and children die from diseases directly related to drinking polluted water.

Even if there is enough food to eat, families may still be slowly dying from another form of hunger called “invisible hunger” and it comes from drinking unsafe water. Waterborne parasites, received from drinking contaminated water, multiply continuously in already weakened bodies -- robbing their hosts of the nourishment and energy they need to grow and develop normally.

A full 80% of fatal childhood diseases that kill children and destroy families worldwide are caused -- not by shortages of food and medicine -- but by drinking contaminated water. When you think of fighting hunger, you may think only of emergency relief efforts bringing shipments of food. When you think of healing disease, you may think only of doctors, nurses and medicine.

But you can actually stop hunger, heal disease and save many thousands of precious lives with the simple gift of water. And long after a humanitarian relief effort has ended and temporary medical teams have gone -- the gift of water continues to heal.

Water can overcome poverty. Water is the lifeblood of a community. When water is unsafe to drink, the entire community suffers.

Sick children lack the energy to learn and weak young men lack the drive to work hard – and so poverty continues. In many rural communities, it is the women and children who are responsible for locating and transporting water. Fulfilling this daily responsibility often leaves little or no time for women to pursue developmental opportunities and for the young to get an education – and so poverty continues.

Nothing can change a community like providing a source of clean water for the first time. It creates a complete transformation. It has the power to actually stop the cycle of poverty. The entire community becomes healthier. For the first time, children become eager to learn while young men and women are able to work harder to produce an income and more food.

Everyone can envision better futures and begin working towards them. Giving clean water to a poverty stricken community is like giving a blood transfusion to a dying man. Water means new potential, new hope for a better tomorrow, and a new life.

United Nations Second Water Decade

In 2002, now as a private citizen, because water and sanitation for health had fallen off the map as a critical issue, I decided it was time to launch a Second UN Water Decade. I drafted a UN Resolution which was designed to carry out the Millennium Development Goals, proclaimed at a UN World Conference in New York in 2000 focusing on water and sanitation for health. I focused on Millennium Development Goal #7 dealing with the environment which called on the world to reduce by half by 2015 the number of people in the world without access to safe water.

In September 2002, the UN held its Third World Conference on the Environment in Johannesburg, South Africa and repeated the above goal, adding the word sanitation.

I took my draft resolution to the State Department and asked if they would support this resolution in the UN General Assembly because a government has to introduce such a resolution. They refused. Over the course of the next year, I contacted seven other Western countries and asked the same question. They all refused.

On August 1, 2003, I had a great idea. Because the Government of Tajikistan had launched a UN Year of Fresh Water in 2003, I approached the Ambassador of Tajikistan with my idea and he agreed, with the approval of his president, to introduce my resolution to the UN General Assembly. The Second UN Water Decade, “Water for Life” (2005-2015), was adopted on December 23, 2003 by the UN General Assembly and began on World Water Day, March 22, 2005.

The United Nations has opened branch offices in Bonn, Germany and Zaragoza, Spain whose primary goal is to push the Second UN Water Decade to a successful completion of its mandate.

Congressional Leadership

Congressman Blumenauer (D – Portland, OR) in 2002 returned from the Johannesburg Conference determined to focus U.S. government attention on the drinking water and sanitation issue. Senator Frist (R-TN) returned from Mozambique in 2004 with the same determination. In 2005, many people,

including myself and David Douglas, Chairman of an NGO in Washington, DC called Water Advocates, helped to push the Blumenauer Bill through Congress. On November 10, 2005 the House passed the Blumenauer Bill 319-34 and renamed it the “Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act” and passed the bill to the Senate. Senator Frist, in an act of statesmanship, withdrew his proposal and introduced the Blumenauer Bill which was adopted unanimously by the Senate one week later.

On December 1, 2005 President Bush signed into law the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act (H.R. 1973). For the first time in our history, the Department of State has made drinking water and sanitation a major foreign policy goal of the United States. I believe that to be properly implemented, H.R. 1973 requires an individual, with the rank of ambassador, to be appointed to the Office of the Under Secretary for Global Affairs in the State Department. This ambassador would coordinate development of strategy and oversee implementation of the new law. An Ad Hoc NGO Advisory Committee would also be put in place to advise the Ambassador on the development and implementation of strategy.

State Department Inaction

Because there was zero publicity about the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act, I wrote Secretary Rice on December 30, 2005 and informed her of the act and my two recommendations for action, the Ambassadorial Post and the Advisory Committee. I did not receive a reply.

In August 2006, I wrote Secretary Rice, again proposing my two ideas and saying that the State Department’s June 1 report to Congress on the Water for the Poor Act was inadequate because it did not propose a future strategy as the law required. I did not receive a reply.

In December 2007, the Congress allocated \$300 million to implement the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act. I wrote Secretary Rice a third time congratulating her and asking her to appoint an ambassador to manage these funds and to appoint an Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to advise the ambassador. I have not yet received a reply.

Recommendation

I urge this distinguished committee to push the State Department for immediate implementation of the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act.