

Attention News Editors:

Canada's freshwater supply at risk without urgent action

OTTAWA, Jan. 15 /CNW Telbec/ - Leading Canadian scientists, water policy and legal experts and environmental activists signed on today to a landmark Freshwater Declaration. The Declaration calls on all levels of government to take urgent action now to develop an integrated freshwater strategy that protects the needs of nature while providing equitable measures to supply water for human needs, agriculture and industry.

In its previous two Throne Speeches, the federal Conservative Government pledged to develop a new water strategy for Canada and pass legislation to prohibit bulk removals of water from Canada's major river basins. The government must use next week's new Throne Speech and Budget to recommit to this promise and begin to take meaningful steps on several other critical measures.

"It is the mandate of governments to protect and preserve freshwater resources for the needs and enjoyment of all Canadians," said Dr. Adele Buckley, Chair of the Roundtable on Freshwater, the catalyst for the declaration. "In the absence of an integrated policy, we are flying blind as a nation and jeopardizing our economic and social prosperity."

There exists a myth of water abundance. The reality is that only 1% of our water in major watersheds like the Great Lakes Basin is renewed annually, and in much of the rest of the country, the majority of water flows northward and is unavailable to the populated parts of Canada. We are experiencing regional water supply shortages, extreme pollution from oil sands and mining operations, poor water resource management, a fragmented and uncoordinated governance structure and complacency on the effect of climate change on our water supply.

The declaration therefore calls on our governments to transcend traditional barriers between federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions. Among its major recommendations, it urges governments to:

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- Develop a Canada-wide freshwater strategy
- Fund freshwater and wastewater infrastructure, linking it to plans that incorporate conservation, efficiency and innovation
- Enable formation of enlightened policy by reinstating scientific research and data collection
- Improve and enforce regulatory safeguards
- Bring climate change adaptation into the mainstream of water policies
- Prohibit bulk water removals from Canada's water basins through binding legislation
- Assume Canada's share of the collective global responsibility for equitable access to clean water

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The declaration flows from the Roundtable on Freshwater, held in Toronto in November, 2008, part of the continuing program of the Global Issues Project, of Science for Peace and Canadian Pugwash.

"There are several parallels between this Declaration and the advice provided to President-Elect Barrack Obama in November by about 25 U.S. non-governmental organizations," said Ralph Pentland, a former Director of Water Planning and Management with the federal government. "But whether the Americans act now or not, our own governments must revitalize a badly battered water science sector, reverse an unhealthy trend towards deregulation and to capitalize on the tremendous opportunities offered by better coordinating water, energy and climate policies."

Canadian Pugwash and Science for Peace are concerned with advancing the cause of peace, and alleviating the causes of global insecurity, including the crises that would arise from failure to achieve an environmentally sustainable

future. Canadian Pugwash is the national affiliate of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, which jointly with its founder Sir Joseph Rotblat, received the Nobel Peace Prize. Both are registered charitable organizations.

A copy of the Declaration is available at:
http://www.pugwashgroup.ca/events/documents/2009/2009.01.15-freshwater_declaration-EN.pdf

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