

Press Release

Date: 29th January, 2019

THE JCTR IS CONCERNED THAT THE RIGHT TO SAFE DRINKING WATER IS UNDER THREAT

Water has become an economic commodity, and the over-use of fresh water has significant social, economic and political consequences; locally, nationally and globally. Yet while we rely heavily on water for agricultural production, natural resource extraction and multiple daily tasks of living, many people do not even have access to clean water for the basic purposes of health and sanitation. In early January, the Lusaka Water and Sewage Company (LWSC) admitted that some parts of the city were found to have a contaminated water supply. A few days later, LWSC revealed the contamination was due to sewerage over-flow from two bore holes in a housing development, and plans were underway to rectify the problem. While the *mission of LWSC is to provide quality water and sanitation services at a commercially and environmentally sustainable levels to the delight of our customers and other stakeholders*, the JCTR notes with concern that LWSC is not living up to its mission. The lack of urgency to act on complaints of contamination is worrying.

It is a known fact that thousands of Zambians do not have access to clean water and effective sanitation on a daily basis. Nearly 33% of the population representing about 5.3 million people do not have access to safe water, while 56% representing 9.1 people in Zambia do not have access to adequate sanitation. This lack of access is directly linked to preventable health issues and diseases, such as cholera and diarrhoea. Limits to access are also contrary to the basic economic, social and cultural rights of citizenship of all Zambians. The lack of clean water robs people of their dignity and autonomy. As outlined in the *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*, St. John Paul II noted that “Without water, life is threatened”. Access to water is intimately linked to the common good and the dignity of all people.

Water is a core component of the common good. Access to “affordable water and acceptable sanitation” is critical to the health and well-being of our country, and is an important element of Economic, Social and Cultural rights of citizenship. The JCTR urges the Government of Zambia, through the National Water Supply and Sanitation Council (NWASCO) to ensure that all Zambians have access to clean and safe drinking water but that all Water and Sewerage Companies provide safe drinking water. The Centre further urges LWSC to overhaul the system since the population of Lusaka has grown so as to address problems of contamination in future. It is also worth noting that only 3% of the earth’s surface is composed of fresh water. “We need to use this scarce resource wisely, equitably and demonstrate a “preferential option of the poor”. While many Zambians do not have access to clean water for health and sanitation on a daily basis, those that do have access to water are subjected to potentially unsafe drinking water. This must change. Given its commodification, the JCTR urges Government to give public policy attention regarding the provision of clean water so that people on the margins of society have equitable access. Finally, the compassionate, and inter-generational stewardship of our collective water resources; locally, nationally and internationally is necessary for both peace and the environmental well-being of Earth.

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Bill of Rights

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