

FOCO
CITIZEN FORUM OF PARTICIPATION FOR JUSTICE
AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Aproximation to the Guarani Water System (SAG) and its
social and political implications

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PRESENTACIÓN

The Social Vigilance Program of the International Commerce Agreements and the Integration processes that FOCO develops since 2001 has as one of its main objectives to manifest the reach and impact of the multilateral, bilateral commercial and investment agreements that since the 90s have become one of the central elements of the globalization model servicing large international corporations, with the impulse of central countries.

As it is already well known, in our country the politics of liberation, privatization and indiscriminate openness developed during Menem's government, gave place to a truly festival of this kind of agreements, with more than fifty bilateral treaties made, and an active position in favour of the firm ALCA urged by the North American government.

The failure of the policies sponsored by Washington's Consensus, which were truthfully applied by Menem's government and the start of a new political cycle in the continent, denoted the end of ALCA's proposal, claimed by the social and political movement of the region.

One of the subjects generating more concern through this decade it is that of the country's strategic resources that are seriously threatened by transnational companies and the complicity of the governments of that period. The preservation of the Guarani Water sources, then, gains special meaning given the resource's characteristics and the strategic value of its control to guarantee the right of life. As Doctor Neves study points out, the Guarani Aquifer System (SAG) is one of the world's largest potable water reservoirs, extending from the centre of Brazil to la Pampa, Argentina, flowing underneath part of Paraguay and Uruguay.

This characteristic alone is enough to prove the strategic character of the resource, that will become even more problematic with time as water shortage becomes a problem. Towards 2050 more than 3000 millions of human beings - 80% in the periphery countries- will suffer from water shortage. The global population will increase in number, 3 thousand million, within 50 years, and most of these people will be born in countries that already have water shortage. According to ONU's data, in 2050, the problems that today lay over the fifth part of the population, will affect two of three habitants.

Towards this problem our country and those which control the strategic water reservoir that flows underground, have the huge responsibility to guarantee its preservation to the service of the population and humanity, avoiding it falling in the hands of large corporations that would transform the right to water and life in a new merchandise at the service only of those who can afford it.

The document presented here, inaugurating the Serie Special Report of FOCO 2007, has been elaborated by Doctor Mariana Leonor Neves. Neves is a UBA's lawyer, investigator and human rights activist that, with this document initiates her collaboration with FOCO. Doctor Neves's report is a contribution that FOCO wants to circulate to call the attention and warn the population and social organizations about the importance of the subject and the need to create an active social monitor of the politics and measures that guarantee this resource's preservation.

Jorge Carpio
Executive Director

APROXIMATION TO THE GUARANI WATER SYSTEM (SAG) AND ITS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

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1.- INTRODUCTION

Almost every day we hear, read, and get informed about water. Comments such as that in the XXI century would be the century of wars concerning water are frequent. The circulation of alarming data about water shortage in some regions and the waste and misdistribution in others is becoming common. At the same time, catastrophic statistics about child mortality related to potable water shortage touch us day to day, while the news report on the uncountable draughts and the impossibility to take water to farming areas, which produces millionaire loses and uncertainties among important areas of the world's economy. Within this chaotic scenery, we should place ourselves regionally to analyze how this global situation affects us, and the possibilities that the region possesses to carry on exploitation and conservation of the resource.

So, within this frame, we should identify the main problems that water shortage brings along, and at the same time, achieve an approximation to the understanding of the Guarani Water System. At the same time, we should recognize how we are affected by free trade, multinational companies and world credit organisms with their policies directed to the appropriation of the Water System, to later analyze the social and political outcomes that come with the possession of excellent potable water owned by Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay.

Nowadays, more than 2600 million people, 40 % of the world's population, does not have access to services of healing and more than 1000 millions still get their water from unhealthy sources. The problem of water shortage encourages infections and threatens human development in many states. The first mortal victims of water shortage, water not apt for human consumption, unhealthy water or, lack of hygiene, are the children. Diarrheic infections cause 1,8 millions deaths a year, most of them children beneath 5 years of age. Around 80 % of all diseases in South countries have its origin in the use of unhealthy water. Thousand of millions of people do not have, even today, the proper sanitary installations. Even more, 600.000 white farmers of South Africa consume 60% of the water sources of the country for irrigation, while 15.000.000 of colour citizens do not have access to potable water, half the cities and Palestine villages do not have healthy water, while all colonies settled by Israel do have water, 85 % of the volume of the water in rivers in France is polluted. Brazil owns 11% of the water sources in the planet, although 45.000.000 of Brazilians do not access still potable water.

Prospects are alarming: towards 2025 more than 3000 million human beings- 80% of the "periphery countries"- will suffer lack of water. The global population will increase in the lapses of 50 years in 3 thousand million people and most of them will be born in the countries where water shortage is already being experienced. According to ONU's data, in 2025, the problems that today lay over the fifth part of the population, will affect two of three habitants.

Within this frame we wonder what the United Nations as well as the World Bank look for when they constantly repeat that water would be shorter every year and wars of this century will be caused by water. Following the same line of ideas we should question what these organisms mean when they affirm that the resource should be protected from pollution and that its development should be encouraged. Evermore, they hold that water as a resource should be preserved. Preserved from whom? In terms of the First World, this means that the locals should not have access to it, and consequently cannot use water freely.

In the particular case of our region, according to the words of the World Bank; "In MERCOSUR the industrial and population growth can risk the available resources, including

water”. Even more, Professor Elsa Bruzzone, a CEMIDA¹ ‘s integrant, adds that behind FMI’s pressure for Nación and Provincia de Buenos Aires’s banks to be privatized the water matter is involved: these banks have among its debtors owners of the best lands of the country.

CEMIDA wonders if behind the massive purchase of Patagonia lands nearby rivers from American and European buyers lies an earlier positioning for a future that dangerously advances.

To conclude, it is important to establish that water is of sanitary, productive, symbolic and even cultural importance, and as such should be considered a public good, a resource as indispensable as air, an essential human right, and as such it should be protected, or it can be considered a merchandise and as such transform itself quickly into a lucrative object.

3- BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE GUARANI WATER SYSTEM

The Guarani Water System (SAG) is one of the largest potable water reservoirs of the World, extending from the centre of Brazil to la Pampa Argentina, and flowing underneath part of Paraguay and Uruguay.

It is situated between the parallels 16° and 32° South latitude and meridians 47° and 56 ° West lengths. It extends to the basins of the Paraná, Paraguay and Uruguay. It has a surface of 1.194.000 square kilometres, of which 839.000 correspond to Brazil, 226.000 to Argentina, 71.700 to Paraguay, and 59.000 to Uruguay. In the north, it touches el Pantanal that, at the same time, connects itself with the Amazon. It is unknown the west limit of the water system in Paraguay. In Argentinean territory it is estimated that it gets to Bermejo’s basin; the south limit is also unknown, though it is not discarded that it might reach Pampa and Patagonia’s regions. It is one of the largest underground water reservoirs in the planet, around 50.000 cubic kilometres. Its depth is around 200 metres, though it might reach 1.000 metres. Water’s temperature varies according to the depth.

The region of the water system is populated by 15.000.000 habitants. The system constitutes the main source of potable water for urban, industrial and agricultural

¹ Centro de Militares para la Democracia Argentina

supply. In Brazil, more than 300 cities of around 3.000 and 500.000 habitants are totally or partially supplied by it. Only in San Pablo, more than 60% of the population (5.500.000 habitants) depends on water from the System. In Paraguay, 200 wells that supply for the oriental region of the country have been registered. Uruguay has 135 wells and it uses them for public supply and thermal wells. In Argentina, only 6 thermal wells in the oriental section of Entre Rios's province are being used.

4- SOME PRECEDENTS

The water system possesses richness. To the excellent underground water quality that is suitable to human and agricultural consumption; one should add its richness in chemises such as deuterium and tritium, used in astronomy and thermonuclear essays respectively. Besides, through the rain uranium, thorium and silicium also penetrate in the earth and the water system.

- Some geological characteristics of the Water system were acknowledge over more than 50 years ago, given the explorations of PETROBRAS, YPF and PULIPETROL in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

- The study in the System was made by national universities of four states. The final cost of the investigation was estimated to be of 6.000.000 dollars. But the governments of the region decided to give the project to the World Bank, and this latter determined that the aim of such was to preserve the system from pollution as well as achieve a sustainable development. Moreover, the WB established that the governments of the region would pay its share in "spices" – meaning with water from the system-, which implied the privatization of the resource, without taking into consideration the needs of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay or its inhabitants. Even more, it established that the cost of the project should rise to 26.760.000 dollars.

- On May 22 of 2003, in Montevideo, Mercosur's countries signed the exploration of the Water System for a cost of 27 million dollars that would be controlled by the World Bank,

with the help of the governments of Holland, Germany and the International Agency of Atomic Energy of the OEA.

- In July of 2004, BM called to licitation for the development and confection of a map of the Water System – thanks to the initiatives of Brazilian technicians-. Companies from Canada, Brazil, South Africa and Spain were present. It proposed to deepen the studies of hydro geochemistry, isotopic, geophysics, geology and uses of the resource. For the study of hydro geochemistry, thermals and elaboration of a regional model – operating since 2005 -, companies from United States, Spain, England, France, Germany, Holland, Finland, Austria, Denmark, Canada, Japan and Israel presented themselves. Consequently, Brazil's idea help BM (World Bank), by means of the companies present, to took possession of the resource with the accomplice silence of the Argentinean, Uruguayan and Paraguayan governments.

- In addition, The World Bank has created a “Citizenship Fund” to promote courses, capacitating events related to the System. It has been called to litigation to give this fund to organizations related to the use of water, whether user, private or national, that can collaborate with the project within the view of the World Bank. Within this frame more than 80 projects have been presented, many of them elaborated by National Universities. At present, adjudication contracts of the investigations estipulate that the investigators respond directly to the World Bank and must take their directives, and, moreover every work made would be considered of authority and intellectual property shared by the World Bank, OEA, and adjudicatories of the projects.

- Likewise, a centralized data system where to put all the information collected about the physical, economical and social characteristics of the Estates involved is planned. The results of the investigations will be processed and administered only by the World Bank.

5- SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Considering the before mentioned, we should place ourselves in what is known as “strategic control of resources” –natural and energetic-. That’s why the Water System’s privatization is already in its course and this is the first step towards the new appropriation of Latin-American natural resources from United States, and this is the first important battle for the upcoming war, the war for water and its control.

-Threefold Frontier. Terrorism and Water.

According to CEMIDA if we “took as the central nucleus the place called “Three frontiers” where Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay limit with each other, with no other objective in mind than to give a general panorama of the area, the dominant feeling of the observer would be that of being in the kingdom of fluvial water. The magnitude of the river Parana in the area of its encounter with the Iguazu’s prey, enlarged in the north by the huge prey of Itaipu and the Iguazu falls, force us to think about the grand richness that the surface water of this place constitutes. In what its called “ Silver’s Basin”, the basins of the rivers Paraguay, Uruguay, Pilcomayo, Bermejo, Grande, Parapema, San Lorenzo, Apa, Negro and many others come together, determining the potential of this region with its energetic possibilities and the diversity of resources available.

According to official data the area of the Three Frontiers has a population of 470.000 inhabitants grouped, 30.000 in Iguazú’s port (Argentina), 270.000 in Foz do Iguazú (Brazil), and 170.000 in Ciudad del Este (Paraguay). It is know that, in general, the three countries have in its main cities ;Puerto Iguazú (Arg.), Foz do Iguazú (Br.) and Ciudad del Este (Py.), elements of the national police in large amounts, add to the security forces, intelligence forces, custom agents and private agencies for hotels and others tourist dependencies. It is only needed a not so vast geographical space with a permanent population of moderated magnitude, surveillance and security media to maintain an absolute control over the area and its inhabitants and detect almost immediately any anomaly of importance. The immediate availability of military forces of regional importance, especially in Brazil and Paraguay and a little further in Argentina, are elements that help to the avoidance of delinquency in the denominated area.

In Ciudad del Este a relatively important Syria- Lebanese community has settled, and it carries its activities under strict control. It has been the addressee, along with the Arab community of Foz do Iguazú, of multiple accusations, which are not only irrelevant, but also ridiculous. CEMIDA sustains that the presence of American military forces in the region is related to these accusations, the rise of several informs -that are actually always fake about international terrorism in the Threefold Frontier-, the unfunded charges to the Arab community that lives there , the continuous exercises of the American forces combined with the local military forces, the continuous pressures towards the Argentinean government regarding the installation of an American military base in Misiones, all of the are just manoeuvres tending towards the appropriation of the strategic resources of the region.

- **Indigenous rights and Territory**

The indigenous settlements that inhabit our territory are affected with the water problem. On the one hand, water shortage in the areas they inhabit; on the other side, the privatization of the resource and the ground it occupies might divest them of the lands they have inhabited since ancestral times. Likewise, it is important to remark that for indigenes, water is not only an important element of survival but also a cultural one, which in many cases makes the identity of a community.

Another fact to take into consideration is the practices that this people have carried out along the centuries that have allowed them to develop astonishing technologies concerning the creation of cultivation lands and hydraulic systems.

At present, indigenous knowledge is not being utilized and their Technologies are being relegated, along with the people who made them possible.

We should raise conscience that a responsible management of water to the benefit of our people should not exclude any of the rights that the indigenous people has over the territories that they occupy.

- **Resources and Free Trade and Sovereignty**

Along the political implications that the juridical regulation of the hydro resources bring with it, we should stop mainly in the juridical-arbitrary organs of the international competence that bring along treaties of free trade, which implies an important loss of sovereignty to our Status.

The global Neoliberal system status, in the chapter referring to Competence, Investments, Controversy and Intellectual Property solution that:

a) The Status cannot impede the free access of private companies to the “service areas” – meaning health, education, technology, supplies, cannels of distribution, and raw material (including water under this category)-.

b) The national governments can take precautions for the preservation of the resources and vegetal, mineral, animal and human life, as long as those measures do not constitute a covered restriction to investment or commerce.

a) If a controversy arises between the national government and the multinational company, the company chooses the Arbitral Court.

CONCLUSION

It has been my intention, in this brief report, to provide a straight panorama about the GUARANI WATER SYSTEM, and the consequences of the neoliberal policies of the management of our water.

I believe that only the society as a whole can generate awareness about the importance of the preservation of the Water System for the needs of our towns. We should stay strong on our position against international pressures that want to impose privatization on our strategic resources. Our resources should be in our hands.

Mariana Leonor Neves.