

Open letter

To: Mr. Joan Clos, UN-HABITAT Executive Director

CC

Andre Dzikus

Otieno Pireh

Rafael Tuts

18 September 2017

Dear Mr. Joan Clos,

We the undersigned, the Global WOPs Alliance (GWOPA) members and organisations supporting the GWOPA mission would like to express collectively our great concern regarding UN-HABITAT's recent conduct in GWOPA. We have learnt from GWOPA International Steering Committee (ISC) members that the UN-HABITAT has attempted to change the most important character of the GWOPA, i.e., its governance as an Alliance, and transform it into a UN-Habitat project, disregarding its core purpose, origin, history and accomplishments.

We, civil society organisations, trade unions and public water operators applauded when the GWOPA was born in 2009 on the request of UN Secretary- General Kofi Annan after he had received the "Hashimoto Action Plan" from the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB). We shared the conclusions of the "Hashimoto Action Plan": over 90% of water and sanitation operators are public entities, and thus represent the same proportion of the available experience in running water services. By providing a vehicle to mobilise and share the expertise embedded in public water utilities, the GWOPA has held great potential for improving the institutional and human capacity to increase access to water and sanitation. The GWOPA has been a unique international platform to support public utilities through not-for-profit peer-to-peer partnerships.

Another unique and important aspect of the GWOPA is its open and participatory governance as a global alliance. We have supported and engaged with the process of building such innovative governance from the beginning by establishing the GWOPA charter and the ISC, in which strategic orientations are debated and decisions are taken through consensus. We acknowledge ISC members' commitments in the past and present and the secretariat's tireless efforts to develop this governance of the Alliance. On the other hand, we are a part of this history and are determined to promote not-for-profit partnerships to achieve universal access to water for all through the Global WOPs Alliance.

The GWOPA has demonstrated its success and enjoyed broad support - more than 300 WOPs projects have been implemented globally. Regional and national WOPs platforms have been established worldwide since 2009 with the GWOPA secretariat's active support. The last (3rd) GWOPA congress in 2015 was a major gathering with several hundred participants. Unlike other global forums, the GWOPA reaches out specifically to local public utilities, civil society, and workers and their trade unions. We confidently argue that the GWOPA's achievements are mainly due to the dynamics of its participatory governance led by the ISC and coordinated by the secretariat.

Considering this history and contributions made by ISC and alliance members to GWOPA, it is not acceptable that the UN-Habitat misapply its privilege as a host agency to drastically change the GWOPA character as it has done since December 2016.

In February 2017, the ISC requested UN-Habitat to allow GWOPA to change host organizations. This request was made because UN-Habitat had not been showing support to the Alliance and was even trying to divert its funds and blocking its fundraising initiatives. Rather than being heard, this request caused the UN-Habitat to act in a repressive manner towards both the GWOPA Secretariat and the International Steering Committee.

UN-Habitat's treatment of the ISC has been highly disrespectful. The meetings of the Steering Committee have been organized without the usual notice or preparation. There has been no consideration of member availability and whether quorum is ensured at the meetings. ISC member contributions to meetings have not been taken into account in the meeting outcomes and the role of the interim chair as the chosen representative of the Steering Committee has been ignored by UN-Habitat. This treatment is eroding member ownership of the Alliance, a feature we consider to be GWOPA's strength.

Meanwhile, UN-Habitat is treating the GWOPA Secretariat in a similarly repressive manner, unduly limiting the ability of its staff to carry out important functions, in particular, seeking funding for the continuation of the Alliance consistent with its mandate, which is an urgent concern.

The situation requires that UN-Habitat urgently:

- Rectifies its relationship with GWOPA -as its host organization- by agreeing to sign a Hosting Agreement with GWOPA with clear Terms of Reference for the hosting that recognizes the independent nature of the Global WOPs Alliance, the guiding role of its Steering Committee and the independence of its Secretariat.
- Renews acknowledgement of GWOPA's mandate for strengthening public water operators through Water Operators' Partnerships and uphold the participatory and inclusive nature of GWOPA as a multi-stakeholder Alliance with full recognition of the leadership of the International Steering Committee, Chair, and the principles and decision-making processes.
- Fully and immediately supports the GWOPA Secretariat to open direct negotiations with the Spanish Government to renew the Hosting Agreement in Barcelona which is due to expire by the end of 2017.
- Fully and immediately support GWOPA's Secretariat efforts to raise funds in general in a way that does NOT transform the GWOPA secretariat into a service provider that charges public utilities for its services.

If UN-Habitat is not able or willing to respect the above concerns, UN-Habitat should release the GWOPA secretariat to be hosted by another UN organization as the ISC decided in its last regular meeting in February 2017.

Finally, we hope to receive your written answer to our concerns and demands within the next 3 weeks.

Upon your answer, we are ready to prepare a broader awareness raising campaign in support of GWOPA.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Signed

International Steering Committee members

David Boys, Public Services International (PSI)

Eng. David Onyango, Managing Director, Kisumu Water and Sewerage Company Limited, Kenya

Dwike Riantara, WOPs Facilitator, Head of Performance Improvement Bureau PERPAMSI (Indonesia Water Supply Association), Indonesia

Giorgos Sachinis, Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company- EYDAP S.A., Greece

Guillermo Saavedra, Federación Nacional de Cooperativas de Servicios Sanitarios Chile Ltda., (FESAN)

Leonard Shang-Quartey, Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC), Ghana

Maqsooda Fatima, National Coordinator Pakistan Water Operators Network (PWON), Pakistan

Matilda Kimetto, Kenya Local Government Workers Union, Kenya

Milo Fiasconaro, Aqua Publica Europea

Miriam Planas, Ingeniería Sin Fronteras (ISF), Barcelona

Neil Macleod, the Interim chairperson of ISC, retired Head of eThekweni Water and Sanitation, South Africa

Roberto Olivares, National Association of Water and Sanitation Utilities of Mexico (ANEAS)

Rudie Kusmayadi, Chairman PERPAMSI (Indonesia Water Supply Association), Indonesia

Samir Bensaid, Office National de l'Eau Potable (ONEP)/Institut International de l'Eau & Assainissement (IEA), Morocco

Other organisations

AEOPAS -the Spanish association of public water operators, Spain

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), USA

Aqua Publica Europea, Europe

Asociación de Usuarios del Agua de Saltillo AUAS, A.C. , Mexico

Attac Luxembourg

The Berlin Water Table, Germany

Comitato provinciale Acqua Pubblica Torino (the movement for public water of Turin), Italy

Comité de Coordinación ISP-Perú

Corporate Accountability International, USA

Corporate Europe Observatory, Belgium/Europe

Corporación Cultural y Ecológica Penca de Sábila, Colombia

Corporación ECOFONDO, Colombia

CUPE- Canadian Union of Public Employees, Canada

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria

European Federation of Public Service (EPSU), Europe

The European Water Movement, Europe

Fagforbundet, the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees, Norway

Federación Nacional de Trabajadores del Agua Potable del Perú

Focus on the Global South, Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines and India

Food & Water Europe, Europe

Food & Water Watch, USA

Fundación Abril, Bolivia
GRÜNE LIGA e.V. - Netzwerk Ökologischer Bewegungen, Germany
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), USA
KOMMUNAL, the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union
KRuHA (Koalisi Rakyat untuk Hak atas Air) people's coalition for the right to water, Indonesia
K 136 Thessaloniki, Greece.
La Asamblea Veracruzana de Iniciativas y Defensa Ambiental (LAVIDA), Mexico
Palestinian Hydrology group for Water and Environmental Resources Development, Palestine
Platform for Public Community Partnerships in Americas (PAPC)
Public Services International (PSI)
SOSste to Nerò (S.O.S. Water campaign in Thessaloniki), Greece
Thessaloniki Water & Sewage company EYATH Trade Union, Greece
Transnational Institute (TNI), International
UNISON, the public service union UK
United Services Union ver.di, Department of Water Services, Germany
VISION (Trade unions for workers in municipalities, county councils and churches), Sweden
Wasser in Bürgerhand, Germany
Water Commons, USA

Individuals

Anne Le Strat, former chairwoman/president of Eau de Paris, France
Antonio Miranda, former UNSGAB boardmember, ex-GWOPA ISC founding member
Art Cohen, SANIPLAN-USA
Dr Arvind Sivaramakrishnan, United Kingdom
Catherine Baron, Professor at the LEREPS/ Political Science Institute of Toulouse, France.
Christa Hecht, General Manager of Allianz der öffentlichen Wasserwirtschaft e.V., Germany
Dr David Barkin, Mexico
Professor David Hall, Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), University of Greenwich, United Kingdom
Professor David McDonald, the Director of the Municipal Services Project, Queen's University, Canada
Dr Emanuele Lobina, Public Services International Research Unit, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom
Professor Erik Swyngedouw, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom
Gerard Rundberg, Director Waternet International (retired), The Netherlands
Jerry van den Berge, EuSAIN-European Sanitation Initiative, The Netherlands