

...implementar u...  
...de una cultura del encuentro en tot...  
...derechos universales. La ciencia, la cultura, la...  
...contribuir al logro de sociedades más justas, so...  
...comprometidas con el cuidado de la casa común.

Francisco

PONENCIAS

SEMINARIO DERECHO HUMANO AL AGUA

# PONENCIAS

## SEMINARIO DERECHO HUMANO AL AGUA

23 al 24 de febrero de 2017  
Casina Pio IV | Ciudad del Vaticano



# PONENCIAS

SEMINARIO

# DERECHO HUMANO AL AGUA

APORTES Y PERSPECTIVAS INTERDISCIPLINARIAS SOBRE  
LA CENTRALIDAD DE LAS POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS EN LA  
GESTIÓN DE LOS SERVICIOS DE AGUA Y SANEAMIENTO

23 y 24 de febrero de 2017

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CÁTEDRA DEL DIÁLOGO Y  
LA CULTURA  
DEL  
ENCUENTRO





“En realidad, el acceso al agua potable y segura es un derecho humano básico, fundamental y universal, porque determina la sobrevivencia de las personas, y, por lo tanto, es condición para el ejercicio de los demás derechos humanos.”

*(Laudato Si', 30)*

# EJE 1

## EDUCACIÓN PARA UNA ECOLOGÍA INTEGRAL: EL DESAFÍO DEL FUTURO



## **Panel 3**

**EL DERECHO AL AGUA Y EL  
DESARROLLO SOSTENIBLE: HACIA  
UNA ECOLOGÍA INTEGRAL EN EL  
CUIDADO DE LA CASA COMÚN**

# HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER AND GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

PETER GLEICK<sup>17</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The official text of the much-anticipated Vatican's Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'* ("On Care for our Common Home") was released in May 2015.<sup>18</sup> While considerable attention was devoted to the portions of the Encyclical related to climate change, the letter also tackles other environmental challenges, including biodiversity, food, and especially the critical issue of freshwater. Woven throughout is attention to the social and equity dimensions of these challenges and a deep concern for the poor. Much of this focus adopts a "human rights" perspective.

Even in the 21st century, there remain significant and unresolved disparities in access, quality, and use of water between the wealthier, industrialized parts of the world and poorer populations. In many parts of the world, human use and extraction of water now exceeds natural resource limits – a problem I've described elsewhere as "peak water". Today, the UN estimates that around 2.5 billion people on the planet still lack access to safe sanitation and 750 million do not have safe drinking water. Worldwide, more people die from unsafe water annually than from all forms of violence, including war. The *Laudato Si'* addresses this where it states:

The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty. (Section 27)

The Encyclical identifies several key water problems including the lack of access to clean drinking water "indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems" (section 28), the challenges for food production due to droughts and disparities in water availability and "water poverty" (section 28), the continued prevalence of water-related diseases afflicting the poor (section 29), contamination of groundwater (section 29), and the trend toward privatization and commodification of a resource the Vatican describes as an "basic and universal human right" (section 30).

The human rights perspective is explicitly raised in Section 30:

Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a

17 World-renowned expert, innovator, and communicator on water and climate issues. In 1987 he co-founded the Pacific Institute, which he led as president until mid-2016, when he became president emeritus and chief scientist. Dr. Gleick developed one of the earliest assessments of the consequences of climate change for water resources, assessed the risks of conflict over water resources, and defined the basic human need and right to water – work that has been used by the United Nations and in human rights court cases. He has pioneered and advanced the concepts of the "soft path for water" and "peak water."

18 Encyclical Letter "Laudata Si'" of the Holy Father Francis "On Care for our Common Home." May 2015. (English version: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html))

basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. (*italics in original*)

Section 30 continues:

Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity*. (*italics in original*)

This “rights” framing is consistent with the formal human right to water (HRW) and sanitation declared by the United Nations in 2010, linking the right to water with the right to life and well-being. After many years of debate, the formal UN declaration of the HRW shifted the focus from whether such a right existed to how to implement that right and how to understand the responsibilities of governments, institutions, the private sector, and individuals in satisfying that right.

Satisfying the HRW must take place in the broader context of other global environmental challenges, including poverty. The key here is to make progress on broad sustainability goals without causing adverse impacts and harm elsewhere in the system. This requires integrated science, integrating thinking, and integrated institutions – none of which are commonplace today. This approach, however, is consistent with the strategy used to define the new Sustainable Development Goals, which provide a comprehensive and integrated set of global sustainability targets. The Encyclical Letter explicitly acknowledges the interconnected nature of environment and sustainability issues in the context of climate change where it notes the clear links between a warming planet and threats to water resources and other environmental conditions:

It creates a vicious circle which aggravates the situation even more, affecting the availability of essential resources like drinking water, energy and agricultural production in warmer regions, and leading to the extinction of part of the planet’s biodiversity. (Section 24)

Ultimately, steps forward toward true sustainability must encompass the human right to water and special attention to the injustice of so many people who remain deprived of the most basic access to safe and affordable fresh water and sanitation.