

# *Latin American Mission Program*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for Justice, theirs is the reign of God*

**ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF CHARLOTTETOWN**

81 Prince St. Charlottetown Prince Edward Island CANADA C1A 4R3

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## **The Latin American Mission Program (LAMP)**

Submission concerning  
**The Development of the PEI Water Act**

Presented to the

**PEI Environmental Advisory Council**

*El agua vale más que el oro*  
*Water is more important than gold*

Wellington, PEI  
November 17, 2015

## **Introduction**

The Latin American Mission Program (LAMP) of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlottetown is privileged to present some reflections and suggestions on the formation of the PEI Water Act. We appreciate the efforts of the PEI Environmental Advisory Council to hear the voices and views of many sectors of Islanders.

LAMP is a PEI-based missionary organization founded in 1967 in response to a request to North countries to share personnel with Latin America. Over the years, 21 Islanders went to Latin America, mainly the Dominican Republic, amounting to about 75 person-years .

Our mission is for a short period of time (generally from 3 to 5 years). From the beginning we saw that the foreign presence should not be permanent. We, Canadians, are minor players. We are generally opposed to foreigners taking on or accepting formal positions of leadership in the global South. The humblest Dominican knows more than any of us about what constitutes the new Dominican society. Most importantly, as Canadians, we recognize that our real mission is back home in Canada working for social justice in our own country, a struggle which has consequences on the global level. Being citizens of Canada, we know that our advanced economy and indulgent life style are based on the historic exploitation of countries of the South. We know also that Canada tolerates the repression of its own dispossessed classes and we see the need for us to understand profoundly and rapidly the naked contradictions of the predominant economic system. People in the Dominican Republic continue to show us those raw contradictions.

The LAMP presentation on the PEI Water Act contains the following points:

1. A case study: Water Deterioration in the Dominican Republic – the First Victims
2. Corporate Interests Causing the Destruction of Water Quality and Quantity
3. Hope and Courage of Dominican People
4. Hope and Courage of Islanders Committed to a Clean Water Act for PEI
5. Implications for the PEI Water Act

### **1.0 A case study: Water Deterioration in the Dominican Republic – the First Victims**

(Closer to home, we could also have used California or Detroit as a case study: causes and effects are similar, but more hidden in North America, and more raw in the Dominican Republic)

For decades, the poorest people of the Dominican Republic have suffered daily from the lack of water and from drinking contaminated water. Where there are running water systems in the country, water is made available only a few days a week, and even then, only for a few hours per day.

Everyday women and children carry for great distances, huge buckets of water on their heads, and Dominican women do the family laundry in polluted rivers. It is important to note that Dominicans are meticulous about personal cleanliness and about keeping clean homes. They can teach us Canadians how to get by on much less water than we habitually use. It is amazing what can be done with a bucket or two of water.

(Optional: view 12 slides depicting the water issue in the DR)

Many Canadians, who vacation in the Dominican Republic at all-inclusive tourist resorts in Punta Cana, Puerto Plata or Juan Dolio, have no idea about water conditions in the country. Many Dominican workers who serve tourists and are noted for their hospitality, go back to their humble homes after work to take up the task of finding water for their household use. Not many tourists see or understand that this is a basic social injustice. There is not much we can do about it while on vacation and nobody is uplifted by our guilt, much less by our pity. However we should at least come home and look into some of the issues involving water and other life issues in the DR.

During the summer of 2015, the Dominican Republic faced an alarming water shortage, which touched all lives, not only the lives of the most impoverished people. In June the water authority and the government announced a possible *red alert* when hundreds of communities all over the country, including municipalities, had only about 15 days water supply. As usual the most affected were the poorest of the poor.

Not many people know that the Dominican Republic is a very rich country. Mining interests estimate that the country has mineral and metal reserves valued modestly at more than \$60 billion including as much as 40 million ounces of gold, as well as substantial reserves of silver, copper and zinc. This is not including the value of agricultural production. The World Bank points out that GDP of the DR increased by 50% between 2000 and 2011, mainly through various free trade deals. However, as is often the case with trade deals, this “boon” embellished the lives of a few very rich sectors and, of course, transnational corporations. Such economic “growth” does not trickle down. According to the latest official data, 30% of Dominicans live in extreme poverty. In the rural areas this is as high as 50%.

## **2.0 Corporate Interests Causing Destruction of Water Quality/Quantity**

In the DR, we see the closest connection between corporate interests and the destruction of water quality and quantity. As we prepare for the PEI Water Act, maybe we can better understand corporate interests close to home when we see them in their rawest forms, in the DR.

Of course the DR has many of its own home-grown capital intensive corporations. They are much like their transnational brothers extracting riches which do little to enhance the lives of the majority, who generally constitute a huge, cheap, and disposable work force.

One infamous corporation, Barrick Gold, with its head office in Toronto, with partner Goldcorp Inc, also Canadian, is operating one of the richest gold mines in the world at a place called Pueblo Viejo. Another company abandoned this region about 15 years ago and left behind an environmental mess and a cluster of depressed mountain towns. Barrick claimed that they would be environmentally responsible. That did not happen. Barrick, it seems, was more interested in going for the gold, than in protecting the water, the land and the people.

The use of the area’s fresh water for production and the ensuing toxic run off results in severe health and environmental problems. A newspaper report in September 2014, says that “residents of six communities located next to the mine protested against the health repercussions of soil and air contamination. Tests of residents in four communities revealed their urine and blood contained high levels of cyanide and other heavy metals. The population affirms that the smell of bitter almonds, which is in fact due to cyanide, causes respiratory problems and skin and eye irritation. Other long-term effects of high cyanide levels are urinary problems and cancer. Members of the communities complain that the proximity of the mine causes fever, headaches, chronic cough, sore throat and stomach aches” Residents protested against the effects of the mining operation on their health and on agriculture. Their protests did not result in needed changes.

### **3.0 Hope and Courage of Dominican People**

We share this story of hope and courage with you, as an inspiration. Despite the harshness of their reality and the massive destruction of their environment, the people of the Dominican Republic have amazing hope and courage. They join with other impoverished people in many parts of the world, who are standing up for the protection of water, often in the presence of threats to their lives and to their families.

An example of this hope and courage is another mining story, not far from the Pueblo Viejo mine. For the past two years, there has been an organized country-wide community effort to protect this site, called Loma Miranda, a mountain, in central Dominican Republic, which its protectors say is threatened by nickel excavation. Loma Miranda, covers about 16 square miles, and is home to a unique environment that contains much of the Dominican Republic's biodiversity, as well as dozens of springs, creeks and rivers that provide fresh water to the region. "It is one of the most important mountain systems in the Dominican Republic," said Victor Medrano of the Ecological Society of Cibao. "It produces enough water to provide to the surrounding communities irrigation for the entire region and hydroelectric power." Someone else characterized the location as a "water mine" that is too valuable to the region to be subjected to pollution. With a spirit resembling Plan B demonstrations in PEI, protestors set up tents at the base of Loma Miranda, with thousands of people from across the country joining in. In August, 2014 the Senate passed a bill to designate Loma Miranda a national park, which means blocking the incursion of mining companies. However, President Danilo Medina rejected the bill on the grounds that it violated the constitution and harmed the country's investment interests. In the DR, as in many other countries, governments tend to look out for the interests of the corporations. The jury is still out on the future of Loma Miranda.

### **4.0 Hope and Courage of Islanders Committed to a PEI Clean Water Act**

The people of PEI exemplified their hope and courage on April 19, 2015 when LAMP held a workshop in Kensington entitled *What is in a Water Act?* Fifty-five people from diverse sectors across PEI spent a Sunday afternoon preparing for participation in the Water Act process. Here is a summary of the concerns which PEI residents shared with LAMP about Water Quality and Quantity in PEI and their hopes for developing a clean water Act. (One copy of the full report is given to the EAC)

#### ***4.1 Islanders' Concerns about the current status of water in PEI***

- Amount of water used by City of Charlottetown in one day; concerned about municipality taking water from Winter River
- We can pump aquifers dry as in the US
- Nutrients in groundwater at lowest point ever
- Disappearance of fish
- Harmful potato farming practice:
- Noticing streams reduced in quantity and quality over the years
- Salt water intrusion concern, this is happening in New Brunswick.

#### **4.2 Islanders' Concerns and Hopes about engagement of Aboriginal peoples**

- No Water Act, policy or regulation can be implemented without consulting and being guided by the Aboriginal community.

#### **4.3 Islanders' Concerns and Hopes about whose voice will be heard**

- Who has voice? We need to have equal opportunity to participate
- Irving/corporate involvement have a lot of power
- Act must represent all Islanders, not just those with a vested interest
- Citizens' opinions should carry same weight or more weight than those with vested interests
- Need for a truly democratic process.

#### **4.4 Islanders' Concerns and Hopes about lack of research**

- Research is inadequate
- Lack of baseline data
- People need good information – not necessarily lots of input, but informed input, i.e. well researched
- Islanders need solid information – easy to read for lay people
- Experts' from industry are questionable
- The figures/ numbers must be transparent: explain the proposed recharge, run-off.

#### **4.5 Islanders' Concerns and Hopes about government transparency**

- For too many people government is suspect
- Public consultation must be more than government paying lip service to engagement
- Regulations controlled and implemented by Government without oversight
- Need to develop clean water act, policy and regulations in tandem.

#### **4.6 Islanders' Concerns and Hopes about enforcement**

- A sustainable water act must have enforcement and reporting
- The community has the right to full disclosure
- Monitoring on all wells, should be done by a third independent party
- The Act needs to have a section about ongoing community monitoring
- Citizens should be involved in monitoring, maybe done by watershed groups.

#### **4.7 Islanders' Concerns and Hopes about the quality of the act**

- We need to look at watershed-by-watershed basis
- A good act must be sensitive to all areas of the province
- Indicators of quality of life are as important as economic indicators
- Look at the holistic view : development of ecology impacts, not just water but water as part of all ecology.

## 5.0 Implications for the PEI Water Act

Two areas of concern for both the Dominican Republic and PEI are the major threats of climate change and the possibility of hydraulic fracturing. First we consider climate change. The DR already experiences never-before-heard-of violent weather fluctuations causing extreme drought and deadly floods. On the other hand, PEI's water future must be monitored with the scientific findings of the results of climate change on the quantity and quality of water. Secondly, both jurisdictions are "sitting ducks" for any oil and gas company which determines that there is a supply of natural gas waiting to be exploited. Hydraulic fracturing would cause havoc in PEI and in the DR. The extravagant use of immeasurable quantities of water in the extraction and the use of ultra-toxic chemicals which remain in the aquifer would spell disaster for both territories.

The Latin American Mission Program urges the PEI Environmental Advisory Council to take seriously the warning from the people of the global South and the hope that they offer us. As Maude Barlow says so clearly: ***We tend to think of the water problem as being in the global south and it mostly is; or the worst crisis is. A new report from the World Health Organisation says that every three and a half seconds a child dies in the global south of water-borne disease. What people need to understand is that this is also beginning to happen in the global North.***

It is our hope that listening to all the concerns and recommendations you have heard from PEI organizations and individuals that the PEI Government can develop a Water Act which can be a model for other jurisdictions in its spirit and content. Because we are at the beginning of our process, we can design an innovative, imaginative, and progressive Water Act, freed from some of the old legislative patterns, aims, and restrictions. We are at a privileged moment in the history of the world when every day people know the threats of global warming/climate change and are demanding a more eco-centered approach to all aspects of our lives. People in the North and in the South are more vocal and more committed than ever before about our collective North-South responsibilities for the ecosystem.

## Conclusion

The Latin American Mission Program is grateful for the effort which you, the PEI Environmental Advisory Council, have put into the consultations around the Water Act. We wish you well in preparing your report of all you have heard and learned. We look forward to many more community engagement processes for all phases of the development of the act, the policies and regulations.

Respectfully submitted,

The Latin American Mission Program of the  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlottetown