Focus area on Water and Sanitation

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair,

For the Mining Working Group – since water is life, sustains life, and has independent rights to integrity, water must not be considered a commodity to be bartered for profit.

While we agree with the need for a water-secure world, such a world cannot be realized unless water is sustainable and equitably available to all and acknowledged as a public good.

As we probe water related challenges, to be just and transformative we must look beyond symptoms to systemic and root causes of global water injustices – including unjust use, scarcity, privatization, commodification, overconsumption, contamination, and freshwater loss. What are the forces driving this? We have to ask: Who is benefiting? Who is bearing the burden?

At the PGA session a couple weeks ago, the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation urged us to prioritize the progressive elimination of inequalities in water and sanitation with a focus on the most marginalized groups, on women and girls, and on the rural poor. She warned us that, quote: "an appearance of progress is masking profound injustices."

Therefore, we agree with the assertions in the focus area document that:
1. the pollution of and dumping of toxic materials in water bodies must cease, aquifers must be protected
2. and that we must protect and restore water-linked ecosystems

Deliberations must also include:
1. Guarantee and realization of the right to water and sanitation;
2. Recognition of water as a public good, protected as a public trust and not commodified or privatized;
3. Public financing and investment in adequate facilities and infrastructure;
4. Prioritizing water for human consumption, food production, watershed protection, care of vital ecosystems – rather than for industrial consumption or unsustainable energy production;
5. Effective public and local water governance;
6. Wastewater management that is transparent, effective and just;
7. A moratorium on extractives where vital water supply to local communities, farmers, indigenous peoples, and fishing communities is limited;
8. Recognition of human and environmental rights violations of water by State and non-State actors.

Finally, we have to recognize additional key interlinkages and connect gender, climate change, human rights, environmental protection, health, and chemicals to the issue of water.

March 5, 2014
Aine O’Connor, Sisters of Mercy, on behalf of the Mining Working Group