

Mikhail Gorbachev,
Chairman of the Board,
Green Cross international

To the People of the World,

In spite of numerous conferences, statements and declarations made by various institutions, including the UN Millennium Declaration, words have failed to produce the much-needed water... For the 1.2 billion people who cannot reach or afford safe drinking water, for the 2.4 billion who lack access to basic sanitation, this is an everyday reality.

The UN Millennium Development Goals set the target of halving the number of people without access to water services by 2015. There is a danger that this objective will not be met unless drastic changes concerning the way this issue is dealt with occur.

Access to water is literally a question of life and death. I first learned this through my experience as Secretary for Agriculture for the former USSR, when I inherited a crisis caused by the decision to divert the rivers which fed the Aral Sea. Decades later, this decision continues to destroy lives and has left an environmental wasteland. On the other hand, changing water policies for the better can have a positive effect on the environment, public health and education, and give people jobs and the chance to lead fulfilling lives. The world is at a crossroads. This is the moment of truth.

Faced with this reality, Green Cross International urges the international community to take initiative, to assume responsibility and to play their part in the mission enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals.

WATER IS NOT A PRIVILEGE, IT'S A RIGHT! This is the slogan we have chosen for the campaign and I am sure that nobody in their right mind would deny the essence of it. And yet, the situation is far from simple.

The ultimate goal of the campaign is to contribute to halting the water crisis that reduces the daily lives of millions of people to misery, and is fraught with large-scale conflict and instability.

We must aim for **universal access to water and basic sanitation** – anything less is a violation of our civilization, our human rights, and our morality.

From a practical point of view it is the lack of suitable international legal framework for resolving the global water crisis that presents such a huge stumbling block to the solution of this problem.

A cry for "Water for Life" echoes across the world, but an international document guaranteeing that everyone has a right to safe and affordable water, which would be binding for national governments and that, most importantly, would provide a schematic for the implementation of this right, does not exist.

This is the reason why Green Cross International and its partners are proposing the negotiation and adoption of a **Global Convention on the Right to Water**, which, when ratified by the member states of the United Nations, will give all citizens a tool through which

to assert their right to safe water and sanitation, and would oblige national governments to make sure that this right is respected.

We have launched an **international public campaign**, with other international, national and local organizations, to convince national governments to start the negotiation of this Convention. Regular updates and full information on the campaign may be found at www.watertreaty.org, where a petition for the Right to Water, which I strongly encourage you to sign, is also available.

I realize that some may call us idealists, but I take that as rather a compliment. We at Green Cross are not afraid of difficult challenges – they are the only ones worth fighting for! And we count on the support of millions of people to meet them.

I encourage and invite all of you to become Ambassadors for this worldwide citizens' initiative in your countries, your communities, and your institutions. The Right to Water is our common cause and in order for it to succeed, we need every voice to make itself heard.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Rawson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.