

WHO'S BEHIND THE WORLD WATER FORUMS?

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE WORLD WATER MAFIA

March 2003

Ma-fia

a group of people likened to the Mafia; especially: a group of people of similar interests or backgrounds prominent in a particular field or enterprise [Merriam-Webster Dictionary]

A web of think tanks, corporations, agencies and lobby groups is attempting to control the global discourse of water problems and solutions. The triennial World Water Forums are the major global get-togethers and public relations extravaganzas for this World Water Mafia.

The water mafia is mostly made up of technocrats from development, irrigation and power agencies and representatives of multinational water, engineering and construction companies. They strive to show that the policies they push are driven by concern for the poor and the planet. Yet, in reality, their pseudo-solutions are driven by personal, institutional, corporate and political interests.

The water mafia will push their usual "solutions" in Kyoto, especially through the report of the Camdessus panel on water financing and, it is intended, the statement from the meeting of government ministers.

These "solutions" largely depend upon using development agencies as direct sources of funds (e. g. for large dams and other capital-intensive infrastructure projects) and financial guarantees (to cover risks to private investors), and as levers to force developing countries to allow private operators and investors into their water sectors.

Affordable, small-scale and community-led solutions for water management and sanitation are of little benefit to the water mafia. These sustainable, equitable and efficient solutions – such as demand-side management, rainwater harvesting and low-water sanitation technologies – get little or no promotion in the mafia's reports and proposals.

WORLD WATER COUNCIL

The paramount organization in the water mafia is the World Water Council. The World Water Forums are the brainchild of the Marseille-based Council. The Council's president is Mahmoud **Abu-Zeid**, Egypt's Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation. Its vice-presidents are René **Coulomb**, VP of French water, energy and waste multinational company Suez, and William **Cosgrove**, formerly a VP at the World Bank.

Other members of its Board of Governors include Jacques **Lecornu**, the Secretary General of the International Commission on Large Dams; Raymond **Lafitte**, President of the International

Hydropower Association; John **Briscoe**, Senior Water Advisor for the World Bank; Benedito **Braga** of the International Water Resources Association; Andras **Szöllözi-Nagy**, director of the water division of UNESCO and Aly **Shady**, Senior Policy Advisor for the Canadian International Development Agency and Hon. President of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage. **Abu-Zeid**, **Coulomb** and **Shady** were the founder members of the WWC.

The World Water Council describes itself as "the International Water Policy Think Tank dedicated to strengthening the world water movement for an improved management of the world's water resources." In reality, it is a lobby group heavily weighted with engineering and construction companies, dam-building state agencies, and water supply corporations.

WORLD WATER COUNCIL MEMBERS

The WWC's more than 300 members include:

Central Board of Irrigation and Power, India
Electricité de France
Générale des Eaux/Vivendi Water
International Hydropower Association
Japan Dam Engineering Center
Mitsubishi Heavy Industries
National Engineering Services Pakistan
PriceWaterhouseCoopers
Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam
Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP)
US Army Corps of Engineers
World Bank

GLOBAL WATER PARTNERSHIP

The Stockholm-based Global Water Partnership was, like the WWC, established in 1996. The GWP bills itself as "a working partnership among all those involved in water management." It tends to work more closely with governments and international development agencies than the WWC. It has spawned a number of regional and national "partnerships" which contain similar interests and push similar policies to their global parent.

The first chairman of the GWP was Ismail **Serageldin**, a former World Bank VP, and an Egyptian compatriot of **Abu-Zeid** WWC board member John **Briscoe** of the World Bank is a "co-sponsor" of the GWP.

The fact that the WWC and GWP, with such similar mandates and memberships (and Egyptian chairs), were established in the same year is due more to individual egos and turf wars between funders than to significant differences in ideology, interests or functions.

The GWP is now chaired by Margaret **Catley-Carlson**, chair of the Water Policy Advisory Committee of Suez and formerly President of the Canadian International Development Agency. **Catley-Carlson** is the only prominent woman in the overwhelmingly male water mafia.

CAMDESSUS PANEL

The GWP and WWC jointly sponsored (and tightly controlled) the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure chaired by former IMF Managing Director, Michel **Camdessus**. **Cosgrove** and **Catley-Carlson** served as "sponsors representatives" to the panel. The panel released its report in Paris on March 5, 2003, and seeks to have it endorsed by the Kyoto ministerial statement and again by the G8 meeting in Evian in June 2003.

The 20 (male) panelists were mostly senior officials from the world's major development banks, private lenders and water companies. Among the panel members was former GWP chair **Serageldin**. The panel's main conclusions are predictably that aid money for water should be increased and focused on subsidizing private water supply multinationals and major water infrastructure projects.

BAD VISION

The literature for the Kyoto Forum states that its main aim is to achieve the objectives of the "World Water Vision". What is now referred to as *the World Water Vision* is a report co-written by **Cosgrove** titled *World Water Vision: Making Water Everybody's Business*.

But there are actually two separate World Water Vision documents. Both were proposed by the WWC at the First World Water Forum in 1997 and released three years later at WWF2 in The Hague.

The other "Vision" is the report of the World Commission on Water. This is entitled *World Water Vision: Commission Report: A Water Secure World: Vision for*

Water, Life and the Environment. The commission, which came out with the standard pro-water privatization and large infrastructure positions, was convened by the WWC and co-sponsored by the World Bank, UNESCO and a range of other UN agencies.

The Chair of the Commission was **Serageldin**. Its members included **Catley-Carlson**; Enrique **Iglesias**, President of the Inter-American Development Bank and a member of the **Camdessus** panel, Suez board chairman Jérôme **Monod**, and Asit **Biswas** of the Third World Center for Water Management in Mexico.

BIG DAM LOBBY

In recent years the large dam lobby has become more closely integrated into the rest of the water mafia. While the hydropower industry largely ignored the Second World Water Forum in The Hague in 2000, this year the International Hydropower Association is convening the Forum's theme on Water and Energy. The IHA has named its panels under this theme as the "First International Summit on Sustainable Use of Water for Energy." The advisory committee for the "summit" includes senior WWC officials **Abu-Zeid**, **Shady**, **Braga** and **Szöllösi-Nagy** as well as the World Bank's Senior Dams Specialist Alessandro **Palmieri**.

WORLD COMMISSION ON DAMS

The most significant recent international initiative on water which managed to largely stay out of the grasp of the water mafia was the World Commission on Dams. The WCD's final report sharply diverges from the water mafia consensus on the great benefits of water megaprojects. The WWC and their fellow travelers did not appreciate being excluded from the WCD and were horrified at the findings of its report. They are now attempting to have their revenge by dismissing and distorting the WCD's work, for example in the World Bank's new Water Resources Sector Strategy (lead author John **Briscoe**) and the **Camdessus** panel report.

The water mafia repeatedly claims that its reports reflect the "consensus" among what it terms the "water community" or even "movement" - as if everyone from the French multinational CEO to the laid-off utility worker in Manila have common interests, outlooks, and responsibilities. This is of course bunkum. The World Water Forums at least give an opportunity to advocates for water justice to expose this nonsense before the international community and to push for approaches that can achieve sustainable, equitable and effective water management.

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