

## UN rejects water as basic human right

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OTTAWA - The Harper government can declare victory after a United Nations meeting rejected calls for water to be recognized as a basic human right.

Instead, a special resolution proposed by Germany and Spain at the UN human rights council was stripped of references that recognized access to water as a human right. The countries also chose to scrap the idea of creating an international watchdog to investigate the issue, choosing instead to appoint a new consultant that would make recommendations over the next three years.

Federal officials in Canada said last week that the government wanted to ensure the meeting's outcome reflected the fact that access to water is not formally recognized as a human right in international law. But a social advocacy group said that the position was designed to protect the right to sell water under the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"Clearly (the Harper government is) happy with the status quo: They're not going to be an agent for change, and they're not going to support the right to water," said Maude Barlow, chair of the Council of Canadians. "About every eight seconds, a child somewhere in the world is dying from dirty water, and it's just shocking that our government has taken this position."

The opposition Liberals supported the government's position last week, arguing that the original UN resolution could open the door to bulk water exports to the U.S. because of NAFTA. Liberal water critic Francis Scarpaleggia said he planned to introduce a private member's bill to restrict large transfers of water within Canada to ensure that bulk exports abroad would also be forbidden.

The UN's high commissioner for human rights, Louise Arbour, said last week that the position doesn't reflect Canada's traditional role on the international stage.

"Canada is taking a position that is not the more classic perceived, Canada as the kind of the bridge builder, peacemaker, consensus maker," Arbour told the CBC.

Meantime, Barlow denied that the resolution would require Canada to make bulk water exports to the U.S.

"The requirement in the United States would be for them to conserve first," said Barlow. "There's no requirement as a human right for us to provide water for swimming pools and golf courses and fountains in Las Vegas."

A spokesperson for the Foreign Affairs Department said in an e-mail that there was "no consensus among states regarding the existence, scope or content of such a right."

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