



# Import

## A WEEKLY REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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*Welcome to this edition of Import. In it you will find summaries of new and interesting issues and developments in health and human services, as well as "In My Humble Opinion," a short analytical article by an Agora Group affiliate. Please feel free to visit The Agora Group's web site, which can be accessed by pressing the "our affiliates" button on the Consultant Network web site: [consultant-network.ca](http://consultant-network.ca).*

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### **NEW BRUNSWICKERS WITH DISABILITIES GAIN FROM EMPLOYMENT TRAINING**

New Brunswick's first class in a distance employment-training course for people with physical disabilities graduated recently, thanks to a unique partnership between the federal and provincial governments and the Neil Squire Foundation (an organization committed to providing education, technology and career development for people with physical disabilities). The program, known as Employment Access Skills Enhancement (EASE) gives participants the skills, knowledge and confidence required to gain employment. It is already offered in Vancouver, Ottawa, Regina, Fredericton and Moncton, and New Brunswick's latest graduates are the first group to complete the program through computer-based distance learning.

Over 750 Canadians with physical disabilities have improved their employability and over 350 of them have gained employment thanks to the EASE program.

The web site of the Neil Squire Foundation is at <http://www.neilsquire.ca/index.htm>.



## **NEWFOUNDLAND ANNOUNCES DIALYSIS SERVICES PLAN**

On July 30 Newfoundland and Labrador announced it will implement a provincial kidney services plan, based on the recommendations of its Provincial Renal Advisory Committee. In a province with a scattered population, facility-based dialysis has not had clear guidelines so far, but the Advisory Committee suggests that a minimum of 10 to 12 patients needing dialysis in an area should be sufficient to support a hospital-based dialysis unit. Dialysis sites already operate in St. John's, Corner Brook, Grand Falls-Windsor, Stephenville and Clarenville. According to the provincial government the new guidelines will lead to creation of dialysis units in Carbonear and Gander, followed possibly by units in the Burin Peninsula, St. Anthony, and Labrador.

The provincial kidney program will include a full-time coordinator and a part-time medical director, and will foster the connection between local kidney centres and tertiary resources.

Newfoundland's Provincial Renal Advisory Committee report is found as a 109 page PDF file at <http://www.gov.nl.ca/health/publications/pdfiles/Provincial%20Renal%20Advisory%20Committee%20Report%202003.pdf>.

## **NOVA SCOTIA ISSUES HOMICIDE SURVIVORS' BOOKLET**

*Help for Homicide Survivors*, a new 10-page booklet, is now available to Nova Scotians who have lost a family member or friend through violence. Published by the policing and victim services division of the province's Department of Justice, the booklet offers advice about feelings and concerns common to homicide survivors as they participate in the criminal justice system.

The booklet will soon be available through the Department of Justice web site at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/just>.

## **NOVA SCOTIA OBSERVES PEACEKEEPING DAY**

On August 8, Nova Scotia for the first time observed Peacekeeping Day. The day was designated by the Nova Scotia legislature to honour Nova Scotian civilians, police and military who have served the cause of peace in United Nations and other international peace operations. Nova Scotia follows the lead of several other provinces in designating the day. August 8 was chosen because it was on that day in 1974 that Canada suffered its worst one-day loss of peacekeepers. Nine peacekeepers were killed when a Canadian Air Force supply plane was shot down by a surface to air missile over Syria while on a peacekeeping mission in the Middle East.

Tragically, less than two weeks after this year's observance of the day, two Canadians – B.C. native Christopher Klein-Beekman, and Gillian Clark of Toronto – died as a result of the bombing of UN's Iraq headquarters in Baghdad on August 19. Several other Canadians were injured in the blast. Klein-Beekman was in charge of numerous programs to help children in Iraq, including providing them and their families with medical care and clean water. Clark, who was in Iraq to assess the living conditions of its children, developed some notoriety immediately before her death for blaming the US military for worsening the situation in Iraq by ignoring international standards for detention and treatment of children. The day before her death Clark told New York newspaper *Newsday* that "*They should be held accountable to the international standards. They're making up their own rules as they arrest people.*"



It is particularly fitting that Nova Scotia joined other provinces in designating Peacekeeping Day, since the province is home to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, established by the Government of Canada in 1994. The Centre's main activity is training for civilians and military personnel, to provide practical knowledge and skills to individuals and organizations involved in peace operations. The Centre worked with over 6,000 people from Canada and 142 other countries between 1995 and 2002.

In April of this year the Pearson Centre announced it was increasing its operations in Africa through a \$3 million grant over several years from the Canadian International Development Agency and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The funds are being used to underwrite a major capacity-building role for the Pearson Centre through the Kofi Annan International Peace Training Centre in Accra, Ghana. The Pearson Centre will deliver a series of training programs in Accra. The Kofi Annan Centre capacity-building project comes under the Action Plan for Africa defined at the G8 Kananaskis summit of June 2002. The Pearson Centre already provides training in managing peace operations to over 300 military, civilian and police professionals from the French-speaking African nations of Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and Gabon.

The Pearson Centre's web site is at <http://www.peaceoperations.org/en/home.html>.

### **SASKATCHEWAN RATIONALIZES HEALTH INFO TECH SERVICES**

In a display of cooperation, the administration of the Saskatchewan Health Information Network (SHIN), a Treasury Board Crown corporation, is being transferred to Saskatchewan Health (the province's ministry of health).

Currently, SHIN and Saskatchewan Health both play a role in planning and delivering IT solutions to regional health authorities (RHAs) and other health organizations. When new RHAs were formed last August, joint planning processes with Saskatchewan Health were established. According to the Saskatchewan government, bringing the SHIN development and planning work into the RHA planning process will ensure that IT priorities are aligned with corporate health sector planning. A media release on the development is at <http://www.gov.sk.ca/newsrel/releases/2003/08/15-582.html>.

### **QUEBEC: PREMIER PROMISES A LEANER PROVINCE**

In an August 19 speech to lawyers in Quebec, the province's Premier Jean Charest promised to create a leaner government, Charest said that reorganizing health and social services would be considered as one of six areas for review, and that greater use of the internet would help the province downsize its public service. Said Charest, "*We are going to implement in Quebec the first tangible, real e-government in North America.*"

### **OTTAWA MAN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY: YEAR IN JAIL FOR MINOR CHARGE**

As the culmination of a bizarre example of discontinuity among service systems, Dennis Mather, a 19 year old Ottawa man who appears to have a developmental disability, was released after serving more than a year in jail for the minor offense of failing to report a change of address to police (a requirement of probation for an earlier charge). During that year three government ministries (Health, Community, Family



and Children's Services, and Public Safety and Security), his lawyer and the courts squabbled over how to find him a residence suitable to his needs.

On August 18 Ontario Court Justice Dianne Nicholas sentenced Mather to a single night in jail for the offense. Said Judge Nicholas, "*This is not a question of pointing fingers and directing blame. It's just that jail cannot be used as a default for the lack of funding for programs in our society. These are heart-breaking cases.*"

Mather has now moved into the secure Seeley's Bay Residential Lodge.

### **MANITOBA TO ACT ON CARDIAC CARE REPORT**

On August 18 Manitoba's Health Minister Dave Chomiak released the report of the province's cardiac care external review. Chomiak also made a commitment to implement the report's major recommendations:

- consolidation of all cardiac surgery at St. Boniface General Hospital, and a commitment to report on implementation progress in one year
- appointment of an implementation planning team
- an aggressive recruitment process to establish strong physician leadership for the cardiac care program
- expansion of annual cardiac surgery volumes to 1,300 cases this year, and maintenance of the Cardiac Care Network of Ontario recommended surgical volumes thereafter
- Centralization of all cardiac surgery wait lists and wait list management processes in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Once this process is completed cardiac surgery wait list statistics will be published on the Manitoba Health Web site.

### **NORTHWEST TERRITORIES STARTS COMMUNITY INITIATIVES PROGRAM**

On July 30 the Northwest Territories announced the first round of grants in its new Community Initiatives Program (CIP), developed to address community priorities in the areas of families and youth, healthy lifestyles and safety education with a special emphasis on active living. The annual \$1 million available through this program is targeted at communities that do not have a tax base to support such initiatives.

The 22 grants included in the inaugural round of awards include creation or upgrading of a number of youth and community centres, and creation of recreational resources such as playgrounds and sports fields.

### **CANADA UNVEILS KYOTO AID PACKAGE**

On August 12 the Federal Government announced \$1.3-billion in spending to help Canada meet its targets under the Kyoto environmental treaty. Highlights include rebates, expected to average \$1,000, for homeowners who retrofit their homes to be more energy efficient. The package also contains \$100-million for Canada's ethanol industry to encourage more domestic production of this fuel made from grain or plant matter, which emits fewer greenhouse-gases than fossil fuel gasoline (although critics say this component



of the package is meant to appease rural Canada, and is a relatively expensive way to curb greenhouse gas emissions).

Other spending in the package includes \$130-million for the fuel-cell industry, \$150 million to foster cleaner fossil fuel technology, \$57-million to renovate commercial buildings to make them more energy efficient and \$320-million in shared projects with provinces and Aboriginal organizations. However, the spending announcement will cut Canada's gas emissions only by 20 megatonnes (MT) a year, a small part of the annual reductions of 240 MT required within the 2008-2012 treaty-compliance period. Ottawa must establish targets with several hundred industrial emitters of greenhouse gases to account for another 60 MT of emissions. Prime Minister Chrétien's speech announcing the funding initiative is at [http://www.pm.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=newsroom&Sub=Speeches&Doc=climatechangeannouncement.20030812\\_e.htm](http://www.pm.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=newsroom&Sub=Speeches&Doc=climatechangeannouncement.20030812_e.htm).

Stephen Harper, head of the Alliance Party, described the announcement as "*the beginning of the biggest black hole boondoggle in Canadian history.*"

On another environmental health issue, on August 13 the Government of Canada announced new regulations to reduce future contamination of air and water from two toxic substances used in manufacturing processes across Canada. The regulations, under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, will bring about a 65% reduction in the use of trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PERC) in substances used in solvent degreasing operations.

### **CANADA SUES TOBACCO COMPANIES**

On August 13 the federal government announced it had filed a civil lawsuit related to tobacco smuggling against firms within the R.J. Reynolds and Japan Tobacco groups of companies, including JTI-Macdonald of Toronto. In the lawsuit, the Government of Canada alleges a scheme was devised and implemented to gain illicit profits from the smuggling trade in tobacco products, resulting in substantial revenue loss to the government. It seeks to compel the defendants to surrender profits from their actions and to pay damages. A media release on the lawsuit is at [http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/nr/2003/doc\\_30962.html](http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/nr/2003/doc_30962.html).

### **CMA LAUNCHES CENTRE FOR PHYSICIAN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

On August 19 the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) announced the launch of the CMA Centre for Physician Health and Well-Being, to serve as a national resource for promoting and protecting the health and well-being of physicians, physicians in training and their families.

The creation of the Centre comes on the heels of a representative survey of 2,251 physicians conducted on behalf of the CMA between February 6 and June 3 2003. In the sample, 45.7% of physicians were found to be in an advanced phase of burnout (feeling that they are ineffective, emotionally overrun and exhausted by their work, and showing clear signs of depersonalization in relationships). In an earlier survey of CMA member physicians, 48% of participants expressed dissatisfaction with their chosen profession. Most troubling, according to CMA, are statistics showing physicians have over twice the suicide rate of the general Canadian population. Women physicians are especially at risk.



A media release on the new Centre and a fact sheet on the recent CMA survey is at <http://www.newswire.ca/releases/August2003/19/c2725.html>.

### **FRENCH HEALTH OFFICIAL QUILTS OVER HEAT DEATHS**

On August 18, after a month-long heat wave that contributed to an estimated 5,000 deaths in France, the country's director general for health Dr. Lucien Abenhaim has resigned amid criticism that the French government could have done more to prevent the deaths. However, some argue the deaths reflect a social issue, not a government failure. More than half the deaths were of people outside health institutions – often elderly people in large cities. Given that most French citizens take vacations in August, the argument has been made that many elderly relatives were left by their families in cities to fend for themselves. However, it also appears that parts of many French hospitals shut down while doctors and other staff took month-long August vacations – which may have contributed to a far higher death toll than in other countries experiencing the heat wave (Spain's death toll is estimated at less than 50).

Last week France's prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin cut short his own August vacation to declare a state of emergency that enabled the government to call back public employees, open military hospitals and establish emergency morgues to handle a backlog of bodies.

### **US STATES ARGUE FOR MORE FEDERAL FUNDING FOR DRUGS**

In an interjurisdictional squabble all too familiar to Canadians, all 50 US state governors have endorsed a plan to have the US federal government cover the drug costs of six million "dual eligibles" – people who qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid (i.e. the poor elderly). Under a drug reform plan under consideration by the US Senate, the drug costs of dual eligibles would be split between the federal government and the states, but a rival House of Representatives plan, supported by the governors, would see the federal government cover these costs.

An analysis of state health care costs conducted by the National Governors Association predicts that without shifting the prescription drug coverage to the federal government for these six million people, states would be forced to spend an additional \$100 billion over 10 years, a period in which millions of people will reach retirement age and place new strains on the US health care system. Governors say a requirement for states to contribute to drug costs of dual eligibles would lead to cancellation or cuts to other state-funded health programs, including preventive programs such as the federally initiated but co-funded No Child Left Behind program.

In February, President Bush told US governors during the annual winter meeting of the National Governors Association that he will not support proposals to provide new fiscal assistance to the states, which are struggling with their worst financial problems since World War II.

### **SOUTH AFRICA TO INITIATE AIDS PLAN**

After resisting national and international pressure for the development of a national AIDS plan for years, South Africa's government has announced it will set up a plan by the end of September for a nationwide antiretroviral drug program. The plan will be fully operational by 2008. Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-



Msimang has appointed a national task team to co-ordinate drafting the operational plan with help from the Clinton Foundation AIDS Initiative, established by former US president Bill Clinton.

According to the AIDS Foundation of South Africa, 2.7 million women between 15 and 49 and 2.1 million men between 15 and 49 are infected with HIV, as well as 83,581 babies infected through mother-to child transmission. The Foundation says that within three years almost 250,000 South Africans will die of AIDS each year, rising to more than 500,000 by 2008. Average life expectancy in South Africa is expected to fall from about 60 years to around 40 years between 1998 and 2008.

Some analysts argue the government's change of heart is motivated by an impending election in the state of KwaZulu-Natal, hard hit by AIDS, where the ruling party will lose votes if it is seen as insensitive to the AIDS crisis.

### **WORLD BANK FUNDS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ACTIVITIES**

Timed to coincide with the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (August 8), the World Bank has announced creation of an international fund to support participation by Indigenous Peoples in the decisions that affect their futures. The fund will provide support through small grants to Indigenous People's organizations, offering an opportunity to design and implement sustainable development projects and programs based on their own aspirations. The Fund will also involve a training program for leaders, to strengthen the Indigenous Peoples Organizations of the Andean countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela). As well, the Fund will help support a newly-established advisory body to the UN Economic and Social Council, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which will provide advice and recommendations on six areas pertaining to Indigenous Peoples: economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights. Created in 2000, the UN Permanent Forum is made up of 16 experts -- eight nominated by Indigenous Peoples and eight by governments -- and meets annually to discuss and raise awareness of indigenous issues, as well as provide advice and recommendations to the United Nations system. The Permanent Forum's membership includes two Canadians -- Wilton Littlechild of Cree Nation #407 (a lawyer and a former MP who was the first Treaty Indian ever elected to the House of Commons) and Wayne Lord, a Canadian diplomat of Métis ancestry.

The UN's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, has recently called attention to the plight of Indigenous Peoples in the face of development projects masquerading as benefits. Calling them "poisoned blankets", these projects, according to Stavenhagen, have devastating effects: loss of indigenous territories and land, forced evictions, large-scale migration and resettlement, depletion of natural resources, environmental degradation, and harassment and physical violence against those in the indigenous communities opposed to such activities. Mr. Stavenhagen warns that the international community is in a kind of 'final frontier of centuries of encroachment', that threatens the very existence of some groups. He spoke about 'impending cultural genocide' (the actual extinction of some groups, particularly in the Amazon). The threat was largely coming from what was clumsily defined as economic development on the lands and communities of Indigenous Peoples.



According to the World Bank, there are 200 million Indigenous people living in more than seventy countries. A web site detailing the World Bank's activities for Indigenous Peoples is at <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/63ByDocName/IndigenousPeoples>. The web site of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/pfii/index.html>.

### **IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: WATER WARS**

As we watch the fallout from a war in Iraq that many of us believe is about oil rather than democracy, it is worth reflecting on the words of a World Bank official about a different kind of war. Said World Bank Vice-President Ismail Serageldin several years ago, "*The wars of the twenty-first century will be fought over water, not oil.*" His warning is particularly germane since 2003 is the International Year of Fresh Water. Clearly, how we handle fresh water will affect the health and well-being of Canadians, but it affects even more the billions of global citizens who do not have access to the volume and quality of water found in our country.

With oil, the human race has practically no competitors for use of the resource other than a few oil-gobbling microorganisms. But all living things are our competitors or our partners in using water. Many of these competitors/partners are like us – they depend on a surprisingly small amount of fresh water on the planet.

Only 2.5% of the world's water is fresh, while 97.5% is in our oceans. Of the world's freshwater, about 70% is stored in glaciers, ice sheets and mountainous areas – places hard to access. Most available freshwater is not in rivers and lakes: there is five hundred times more in underground aquifers than in rivers and lakes. Aquifers are tapped by wells that often withdraw water far faster than nature can replenish it, leading to falling water tables and the intrusion of ocean salt water into the aquifers.

The world's six billion inhabitants already appropriate 54% of all accessible freshwater in rivers, lakes and underground aquifers. By 2025 humankind's share will be 70%. This estimate reflects the impact of population growth alone. If per capita consumption continues to rise at its current rate, humankind could use over 90% of all available freshwater within 25 years, leaving just 10% for all other living beings. According to World Bank statistics, on a global basis 69% of all water withdrawn for human use annually is used in agriculture (mostly as irrigation), industry accounts for 23% and domestic use (household, drinking water, sanitation) accounts for about 8%.

It's no wonder international organizations are worried. The United Nations World Water Development report *Water for People, Water for Life*, released early in 2003, and written as a result of cooperation among 23 UN agencies, warns that "*By the middle of this century, at worst 7 billion people in sixty countries will be water-scarce, at best 2 billion people in forty-eight countries.*"

The World Bank is also concerned, and 16% of its lending over the past decade has been for water-related projects. In February 2003 the World Bank released its Water Resources Sector Strategy. Starting with the premise that "water resources management and development is central to sustainable growth and poverty reduction and therefore of central importance to the mission of the World Bank", the Bank proposed continued and enhanced involvement in water projects based on what the Strategy calls a "pragmatic but



principled approach” – a phrase some critics see as over-reliance by the World Bank on privatization of water supplies.

International attention to water, while increasing, is not new. The International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin in 1992 set out the four Dublin Principles that are still relevant today:

- **Principle 1:** Fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment
- **Principle 2:** Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policymakers at all levels
- **Principle 3:** Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water
- **Principle 4:** Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.

Why should waterlogged Canadians care about the world’s water? Two reasons come to mind:

- A world torn by political, social and economic conflict over the quantity and quality of available water is not in Canada’s best interest, since the rest of the world is our partner in our mutual well-being.
- Canadians may not be as water-blessed as we think we are.

We think of North America (particularly Canada) as water-rich. To some extent this is true. The UN report says North America has 15% of the world’s available freshwater (much of the continent’s water is not “available” because it is locked up as ice or is too remotely located to be accessed). But other continents have more. South America has 26% of the world’s available freshwater, and Asia has 36%. What makes us seem water-rich in North America is the low population using the water – we account for only 8% of the world’s population, and we have 15% of its available water. Asia, with 36% of the water, has 60% of the population. Two-thirds of the world’s population live in areas receiving only one-quarter of the world’s annual rainfall.

Within North America, Canada has most of the water and the US has most of the population. Even within Canada, 60% of our fresh water flows north to the Arctic, while 90% of our population hugs our southern border – and water readily available to that 90% is water most likely to be polluted by agricultural runoff and industrial effluents.

Nevertheless Canadians are water gluttons, with per capita consumption exceeded only by the US. According to Health Canada the average Canadian adult drinks only 1.5 litres of water daily, including water used in drinks such as coffee, tea and juice. Yet according to Statistics Canada, we each use about 343 litres of water a day, just inside our homes. Most goes down toilets and bath drains or onto our lawns, a gluttony abetted by the fact that Canadians pay the lowest cost per litre for water of any other country.



Perhaps we can be lulled into complacency by the fact that Canada has had a federal water policy since 1987. But the 2001 *Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development*, using Canada's approach to the Great Lakes basin as one its barometers, pointed to serious concerns about Canada's approach to water:

*"Our overarching concern is the ambiguity of federal commitments. We often saw federal departments doing things without having clearly articulated what they wanted to achieve. Cleaning contaminated sediment, getting areas of concern de-listed, promoting realistic water pricing, and protecting public health by ensuring that people know when it may not be safe to drink the water or eat the fish — are areas where the federal commitment is unclear. Indeed, federal departments often define their role as supporting the priorities of others rather than their own. The government does not have some of the basic information it needs to develop priorities and action plans. For example, it has no overall picture of the many contaminants in the [Great Lakes] basin or the contribution of groundwater to the basin. Consequently, it is involved in many remedial actions with no way to determine which are the most important and what they will contribute..... Generally, the state of Canada 's drinking water is considered good, but recent events have shaken the public's confidence. Drinking water is primarily a provincial responsibility. Since 1968, Health Canada has played a key role in the development of drinking water quality guidelines to protect Canadians' health. But it does not know the quality of drinking water across the country or whether the provinces are applying the guidelines..... In 1987 the federal government released its water policy. But the policy was set adrift because funds and specific departmental responsibilities were not allocated. It became unclear which of the five strategies or 25 policy statements and related activities in the water policy were still priorities. Through the years, the government has lacked a consistent and clear strategy for updating the Federal Water Policy.... Its 1987 Federal Water Policy committed the federal government to promoting and applying realistic pricing and user pay principles. The federal government has not effectively implemented its policy to reduce domestic consumption of water through demand management and realistic pricing.... Our findings show that the federal government needs to decide its priorities for fresh water and clarify its commitments to achieving them. Working with its partners, it needs to develop realistic, scheduled plans with clear accountability; stick to its plans; and provide open and transparent information on results".*

In many countries (and in post-Walkerton Canada, particularly in Aboriginal communities), the issue is not only water quantity – it is also water quality, because of the pollutants and dangerous microorganisms it harbours. According to the UN report, in 2000 estimated mortality due to water sanitation hygiene-associated diarrhea and other water/sanitation-associated diseases was 2,213,000. Another recent UN report asserts that half the population of Bangladesh is at risk of cancer from drinking well water tainted with naturally occurring arsenic found in shallow wells dug in the country under the auspices of the UN itself.



Water interacts intimately with other global systems in ways that can help or hurt. Climate change, for instance, will worsen the water crisis. According to the UN report:

*“Tropical and sub-tropical regions will probably get lower and more erratic rainfall. With a discernable trend towards more frequent extreme weather conditions, it is likely that floods, droughts, mudslides, typhoons and stream flows at low-flow periods may well decrease and water quality will undoubtedly worsen, because of increased pollution loads and concentrations and higher water temperatures. Recent estimates suggest that climate change will account for about 20 percent of the increase in global water scarcity”.*

As well, the results of a study of Lake Tanganyika (Africa's largest lake) released this month by US and Belgian scientists claims global warming is to blame for falling fish harvests in the lake. Warming air and water and decreasing wind have reduced mixing of the lake's surface water and deeper, nutrient-rich layers. The changes have curbed algae growth, reducing food for important fish species. The lake yields 200,000 tons of fish a year as food and revenue for Burundi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Netherlands, a country literally built on a centuries-old policy of getting rid of excess water, now faces dry times as a result of climate change, and its government is revamping its water management policy. In an August 15 letter to local governments, the Dutch cabinet warned of possible restrictions on water use by businesses, including a cut in supplies to electricity plants that could cause rotating blackouts.

It is where nations share water resources, and therefore argue over the division of the spoils, that the potential for conflict – escalating to the point of war – exists.

There are presently 261 international river basins, and 145 nations have territory in shared basins. Based on an analysis over fifty years, 1,200 cooperative interactions have occurred in shared basins versus 500 conflicts, and there were no formal wars. However, progress in managing transboundary aquifers lags far behind. And there are a number of places in the world where water can spark conflict.

For instance, there is ongoing tension between Bangladesh and India over water. The two countries share 54 rivers including the massive Ganges. As recently as August 13, Bangladesh formally protested India's plans to link 37 rivers by building reservoirs and canals to divert water from India's flood-prone east to its arid central, western, and southern regions. Bangladesh fears the project will reduce water levels in Bangladesh, deplete fish stocks, affect river transport, threaten the livelihoods of millions, and lead to desertification in the north and east and increased salinization at estuaries in the south.

India and Pakistan, already adversaries over water-rich Kashmir, share the Indus – another flash point for possible water wars. The Zambesi River system basin spans nine states, some of them unstable. Egypt has threatened Ethiopia with war if it diverts more water from the Blue Nile. Israel and Syria have twice resorted to violence over the Jordan River. Turkey is diverting half the flow of the Euphrates River into Turkish dams and irrigation canals, and Syria plans to take 3.5 trillion gallons from the Euphrates before it enters Iraq, posing another threat to Iraq's hard pressed water supply. Closer to home, on August 14 the Governor of Texas proposed shutting off taps that supply Mexico with Colorado River water because Mexico has allegedly not provided the US with its fair share of water from the Rio Grande river system under terms of a 1941 treaty.



For Canadians, the least acceptable response to the world's water crises is to congratulate ourselves on our water supply and to continue to gluttonize it. A better response is to do what we can to preserve the quality and quantity of our own water, by practicing conservation and by ensuring that we and our governments do everything we can to preserve and enhance our water quality.

It would be even better, though, to recognize the plight of our fellow global citizens. Canada can use its global peacekeeping reputation to argue for international laws and protocols to protect water, to ensure its fair distribution, and to defuse conflicts over water. And we can also use our foreign aid budget in ways that give water supplies a high priority.

John Butler, The Agora Group

### **FROM THE QUOTES VAULT**

*"Do not insult a crocodile while your feet are still in the water."*

South African proverb

### **IN MEMORIAM**

**Nelia Laroza,**

a Toronto health worker who died of SARS

**Tecla Lin,**

a Toronto health worker who died of SARS

**Dr. Nestor Yanga,**

a Toronto health worker who died of SARS

**Christopher Klein-Beekman,**

who died in the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad

**Gillian Clark,**

who died in the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad

**Lewis Wheelan,**

a young injured worker who died from injury-related complications brought on by the electricity blackout