

NICARAGUA: Court Orders Halt to Water Privatization

RRN letters Oct 8 2004, Oct 20 2004, Jan 26 2005, Feb 22 2005

Because of popular support to maintain a public water system, RRN members have written to officials of the Inter-American Development Bank and the government of Nicaragua to protest the privatization of water (masked as "modernization"). We expressed our outrage when ENACAL, the national water and sewer company, opened bids to private companies on January 24, just 6 days after the **Appeals Court of Managua ruled that bids to privatize ENACAL must stop.**

On March 22, World Water Day was marked in Nicaragua by protests against ENACAL's inefficient service and the government's presumed plans to privatize ENACAL. At 8:00 am on March 22 **over 500 citizens from Managua and nearby towns and provinces gathered on University Avenue to begin their march**, which passed the offices of the national water regulatory institute, INAA, and ended outside the National Assembly. The march was organized by the National Union of Consumers of Nicaragua (UNACUN) which is an umbrella group representing five civil society organizations and the Consumer Defense League (LIDECONIC).

According to UNACUN representatives, **the potable water supply crisis has reached its most critical point** in the history of ENACAL's existence. Community leaders from over 50 of Managua's neighborhoods and over 22 municipalities outside the capital have reported to UNACUN that the **majority of ENACAL customers in their areas are seriously affected by water shortages.** One neighborhood in Masaya has had no water for over three months.

LIDECONIC's legal adviser Maura Morales shares the opinion expressed last week by Ruth Herrera, Coordinator of the Consumer Defense Network, that **the government has secret plans to privatize ENACAL** in the near future and **officials are therefore allowing the company to fall into total chaos in order to make privatization appear necessary.** Government officials deny these claims.

An article published in El Nuevo Diario entitled "Water Crisis is a National Tragedy" details the extent of the problem across the country focusing on the **over 50% of the Nicaraguan population who do not have access to ENACAL's potable water service** but rely on wells, rivers and other natural water sources to satisfy their water needs. The report gives shocking details of the lengths Nicaraguans have to go to quench their thirst, stories which are rarely covered by the largely urban based media outlets.

In Nueva Segovia, a northern province and one of the driest regions of the country, the Mayor Marcelino Moncada confirmed that **over a thousand inhabitants in 36 communities are currently surviving with no access to any kind of water supply** after the streams they depend on have dried up. Inhabitants are forced to dig holes in the river bed in order to find water. As the

cruel heat of the end of the dry season advances, however, these holes have also dried up. Unfortunately there are no accurate statistics indicating the percentage of Nicaraguans who face serious consequences to their health as a result of drinking contaminated water but it is logical to assume that the number is very high.

Read more at the Nicaragua Network web page at www.nicanet.org .