

## Why Waste Women Who Are Working for Water Sustainability?

On World Water Day the United Nations (UN) asks the world ‘Why Waste Water?’ urging us to conserve water. This conservation of water is essential to respecting water. Water sustainability means having safe access to healthy water for life. By not wasting water we can promote water sustainability. To discern between a good use of water and a waste of water we need full and equitable political participation. Indigenous women have much to contribute to the dialogue about water sustainability and sustainable uses of water. Too often indigenous women are excluded from local, national, and international discussions about how water is wasted and how water is used in a sustainable manner.

Many indigenous women have unique responsibilities, rights, and roles related to water. Indigenous women contribute greatly to the sustainability of water. Today indigenous women carry on their ancestors’ millennial work, leading their Indigenous Peoples in sustainable peace. Ongoing violent colonialism hurts Indigenous Peoples and prevents indigenous women from fulfilling traditional leadership roles tending and respecting our waters. On World Water Day we urge the United Nations and its members to consider ways it can protect Indigenous Peoples, especially indigenous women, from violent developers of ecosystems of which we are a part. We ask the UN to include Indigenous Peoples’ representatives, especially women, within peace processes that respect our responsibilities and rights to protect water that flows through our living Indigenous Peoples and our ancestors’ remains.

Indigenous women participate in ecosystems that provide infrastructure in many countries around the world. On January 26, 2017, Yoryanis Isabel Bernal Varela of the Wiwa Indigenous People of Sierra Nevada in South America, was murdered. Yoryanis led her Indigenous Wiwa People in respecting water and women despite pressures from unsustainable developers in hydroelectric, mineral extraction, and fumigation of areas appropriated by drug cartels. We ask the UN to recognize Yoryanis’ and her Indigenous People’s contribution to the sustainability of water on World Water Day and on the occasion of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 61. Indigenous women invite the UN to join us and work to end violence against Water Protectors.

Many Indigenous Peoples stand in alliance with Oceti Sakowin and the Standing Rock Lakota Indigenous People, especially indigenous women and youth protecting waters. Standing Rock Water Protectors inspire other Indigenous Peoples to amplify their proposals for a peaceful end of water contamination caused by extractives, uranium, toxins, GHG’s and unsustainable factories and agribusiness. These diverse intercultural Water Protectors who gathered at Standing Rock remain committed to not wasting water. We ask the UN and its Member States to condemn the violence against Indigenous Peoples, especially indigenous women and youth, and recognize the contribution of Indigenous Peoples to water sustainability on World Water Day.

State-sponsored violence against indigenous women working for water sustainability includes police brutality, support for paramilitary and private security violating human rights, arbitrary detention, denial of due process, excessive force, lack of protection, water contamination, religious discrimination, and assault on women’s reproductive health systems.

Because Sustainable Development Goal 6 encourages all States to enable safe access to healthy water as a step toward eradicating poverty, we wonder, ‘Why waste women who are working for water sustainability?’ Water is life. Lives of indigenous women protecting water should not be wasted by militia actions against them. Water sustainability requires productive inclusion of indigenous women in peace processes. Conservation of water requires full and equitable political participation in determining sustainable uses of water. On World Water Day during CSW61, the UN and its Members States have the opportunity before them to recognize indigenous women’s contributions to water sustainability by protecting indigenous women protecting water.

