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Berliner Wassertisch, Speakers Team, 22.03.2018

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Berlin has become Blue Community - a very special World Water Day

Today, by resolution of the House of Representatives, Berlin became a “Blue Community” on the occasion of World Water Day 2018.

The State of Berlin thus commits to truly implement the human right to water and basic sanitation within the city, and thus to make drinking water fountains and toilets extensively available free of charge in public areas. Additional principles include maintaining the water supply as a public good, protecting Berlin’s rivers, canals and lakes, cultivating international partnerships and promoting the use of tap water instead of bottled water. The last of these points is especially appropriate for projects in schools and universities, which is why the Senate specifically highlighted educational work in the field of water in its resolution. Such work ranges from explaining the quality of our tap water compared to many bottled waters (which, tests have shown, are of inferior quality), includes the avoidance of plastic waste and extends through to explaining the water footprint, particularly with respect to water in many of the foods and goods that we import from countries of the South.

The coalition government is thus implementing what started a year ago at the suggestion of the Berliner Wassertisch. The initiator of this project - world-renowned water activist and winner of the Alternative Nobel Prize, Maude Barlow - was invited, at the instigation of Dorothea Härlin, to Berlin’s House of Representatives to present the Blue Community project to an interested public. The project, which is intended to be global, was developed by the Council of Canadians, of which Maude Barlow is the Chairman. Berlin follows Bern and Paris to become the third “blue” capital in Europe. (Munich and Marburg have already been recruited in Germany).

According to Johanna Erdmann, co-founder of the Berliner Wassertisch, “the remunicipalization of the Berliner Wasserbetriebe was initiated by the “Our Water” referendum. We are delighted that our suggestion to invite Maude Barlow to the House of Representatives has resulted in a further step towards the more intentional, socially beneficial and environmentally friendly use of water - the elixir of life - in our city. We Berliners now need to supplement this idea with specific content that we should implement together.” Ulrike von Wiesenau, co-founder of the Berliner Wasserrat, welcomed the Senate’s resolution, “Water is a primary element of life and, as such, should not be a means of generating profit. It must be protected and managed as a commons. Following the remunicipalization of the Berliner Wasserbetriebe, the concept of a Blue Community necessarily entails democratization in order to fulfil the strict requirements of a blue community. In the next few months, the Berliner Wasserrat intends to present to the politicians the participatory model it has drafted.”

A message of congratulations was received from Maude Barlow in Canada immediately after the resolution: “Since the referendum and the subsequent remunicipalization of the Berliner Wasserbetriebe, I have felt a particular connection between myself and the City of Berlin and its many activists. I am delighted to see that, by becoming a Blue Community, you have taken another step towards water becoming a public good and recognition of the human right. When will you be celebrating? I would love to come to the party.” Since last year there has been a group of

stakeholders who have just been waiting for the Senate's resolution to allow them to implement their ideas in this city under the new umbrella of the Blue Community.

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Motion, passed on 22.3.18 in Berlin's House of Representatives (State Parliament):

Berlin has become a Blue Community

May the House of Representatives resolve:

The Senate is called upon to participate in the Blue Community initiative originated by the Council of Canadians. In so doing, the State of Berlin acknowledges and undertakes to adhere to the following principles in the long term:

- To recognize water and basic sanitation as a human right
- To maintain water as a public good
- To protect the quality of the City's drinking water and Berlin's rivers and lakes
- To encourage the use of Berlin's tap water rather than bottled water
- To cultivate international partnerships with respect to the aforementioned aims.

As a Blue Community, the State of Berlin will establish a water fountain program with the aim of more rapidly increasing the number of drinking water fountains in the city. The water fountains should be made more visible and made usable all year-round as far as possible. The water fountains should be distributed as evenly as possible across every district of Berlin. Projects to implement resident-financed water fountains should also be engaged with and supported. The type of water fountain used should as far as possible be oriented towards a locality-specific usage. The Senate should also promote educational work in association with (tap) water and appropriate participants should receive targeted support. To take the lead as role models, as many public buildings, green areas and parks as possible should become locations at which tap water is available free of charge from drinking water fountains or water dispensers.

The extent to which Berlin's water footprint, particularly with respect to water imported from countries of the Global south, can be included in the Federal State's procurement directives, should also be examined.

To this end, the Senate should report to the House of Representatives by 30.06.2018 for the first time and every two years.

Reasoning:

Water is essential for life. Its preservation is therefore one of the most important obligations for political and public administrative stakeholders.

Berlin is already a blue city. The successful referendum in 2011 and the resulting remunicipalization of water in 2013 have contributed significantly to the water quality in our city. Necessary investment in modernising the water network has finally begun. However Berlin's rivers and lakes remain compromised by contamination after rainwater overflows as well as by Brandenburg's open-cast mining, the waste of which flows into the Spree.

The voluntary commitment as a Blue Community will help to actively oppose the threats to water quality in Berlin. It will also contribute to informing the population about the quality of our water. The associated efforts will also fit in with the ongoing implementation of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD). The Blue Community initiative was initiated in 2011 by the Council of Canadians, Canada's largest social action organization, and its Chairman, Maude Barlow. Following in the footsteps of many Canadian cities and communities, the project was launched in Europe in 2013; Bern, Paris and St. Gallen are just some of the cities that have entered into this voluntary commitment. The World Council of Churches is also certified as a Blue Community. Following the example of Basel, entry into the group of blue communities may also serve to promote responsible use of water, even in the Global South.