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HUFF POST WORLD

## Addressing the Water Challenge

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For the last few days I've been the subject of a campaign on social media platforms attempting to portray me as opposed to the human right to water.

An interview I gave in 2005 in which I discussed the public right to water has been shared widely. My critics say it shows I want to 'privatize' water. I want nothing of the sort.

I don't mind being criticized on Facebook or Twitter, because the debate there is helping to spotlight the issue of water scarcity. The reality is we are running out of water to grow food, for households, for energy generation and for industry.

This is not a problem to be dealt with tomorrow. It is a problem that every single one of us should care about today. If nothing is done we will run out of water faster than we will run out of oil.

I do need to correct a misconception that has fueled a lot of the criticism on Facebook and elsewhere.

I do not deny that clean and safe water to drink or for basic hygiene is a human right. Of course it is.

However, I do not think it is right that some people in the world do not have access to a clean, safe supply when others can use excess amounts for non-essential purposes without bearing a fairer cost for the infrastructure needed to supply it.

When we give water a value, we use it more carefully, and this does not mean privatization.

Water is one of the biggest challenges for sustainable development over the coming decades -- environmental, social and economic.

Governments, of course, have a pivotal role to play in managing water resources but today the resources available to governments for public spending are shrinking. Business can and should get involved to help address the issue.

Why does a company like Nestlé care about this?

Our consumers need access to clean, safe water and decent sanitation, wherever they are in the world, as do our hundreds of thousands of employees, their families and friends. As a good global citizen, we have a responsibility to be part of the solution.

My thinking on how to achieve this has evolved over the years, influenced in part by the [discussions I have had with individuals on my blog](#), and by the work I have done with the 2030 Water Resources Group, which I chair.

I have proposed four targets towards an overall goal of water security for all, as my contribution to the debate about the water-related United Nations Development Goals.

Firstly the world should commit to 'safe drinking water by 2025' at the latest, a more ambitious target than the UN has today.

Secondly we should accelerate the provision of improved sanitation, aiming for universal access before 2050. The data shows this is achievable.

Thirdly we should commit to adequately treat all municipal and industrial wastewater prior to discharge by 2030.

Lastly, perhaps most importantly, we must also address the water 'overdraft': we must stop using more water than we have.

Unless we change the way we use water today, global cereal production could shrink by almost a third by 2030.

At Nestlé we believe we can make a contribution, taking responsibility for solutions within our own sphere of influence. Already we have reduced the amount of water we use by six million cubic metres over the last three years, enough to fill 2,400 Olympic swimming pools.

Over the same period we've reduced the amount of water needed to make a ton of product, from 3.29 cubic metres to 2.89 cubic metres. Efficiencies on the production lines and greater reuse and recycling of water have all made a contribution.

We can and should contribute where we can add the greatest value.

The private sector can help governments by sharing best practice, mobilizing finance and management, and by putting forward new solutions to provide safe drinking water and improved sanitation at a lower cost.

To those who oppose this, and challenge me for daring to suggest that business can play a role, I say we have to work together.

We are already struggling to feed a world population that will soon reach nine billion. If we do not change the way we use water, feeding nine billion people will be out of the question.

So I welcome the debate, the criticisms, and the opportunity to engage, because this is an issue far too important to be ducked or ignored, by me or anyone else who cares about the future.