



**United Nations Association in Canada**  
**Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies**

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**Earth Day – Calling Ontario to Global Leadership in Water Management**

The voice of youth is what created Earth Day at the height of the late 60's protest movement. April 22, 1970 saw over 20 million Americans – mostly young Americans -- demonstrating in support of the earth as our shared home. It marked the birth of the environmental movement. Twenty years later, 2 million Canadians marked the first International Earth Day and now join 170 other countries in celebration – and concern.

Over the past five years, the United Nations Association in Canada (UNA-Canada) has been working with youth in Ontario educating them – and encouraging and supporting them in educating themselves - in particular about water issues that we confront locally and globally.

Today, Earth Day 2010, a group of youth from communities across Ontario including Walkerton, Hamilton, Toronto, Kingston and Peterborough, will be presenting a Youth Statement at Queen's Park. UNA-Canada's, *The Ripple Effect Ontario*, has engaged these young, impressive “water leaders” in examining drinking water issues with a focus on source water protection. The Ontario Drinking Water Stewardship Program has supported this youth initiative, along with their communities.

We believe the role of education will be key to Ontario's future capacity to take a leadership role in water management. Key, because what these youth have discovered, and what they are sharing with their communities, is that education on local water sources, and their protection and conservation; on drinking water quality and water management for industry and agriculture is the crux of leadership. These youth are not dreamers: they are planners.

These young water leaders are calling for education, understanding that education is the basis for a population of innovators. Education is the basis for jobs – and green jobs, they believe, will be all jobs if we are to truly innovate. And education is what takes place within and outside of the formal school system, and it includes indigenous peoples in learning and solution seeking.

They are recommending a government partnership in creating a culture of conservation in Ontario. They wish for citizens to regain trust in their local drinking water and municipal systems and to return to drinking tap water – which, ten years after the Walkerton tragedy – is among the safest drinking water in the world. This trust is beginning to be rebuilt and will be enhanced through reinforcing the multi-barrier approach to source water

protection across government to ensure that all communities in Ontario have access to safe drinking water. Another step in building trust in tap water is already taking place in schools across the province and that is the elimination of the sale of bottled water in Ontario public schools and on university campuses, combined with promotion of tap water as the main source of drinking water where it is available.

The Government of Ontario has called for full community engagement and participation in ensuring source water protection and access to safe drinking water and this is enthusiastically endorsed – as it the recognition that this engages communities, businesses, government and civil society groups. These young people have met with many water leaders and commend the growing Ontario Water Conservation Alliance – which brings a coherent civil society voice to solution-seeking.

The planned Water Opportunities Act proposed by the Government of Ontario is audacious and builds on Ontario's expertise in clean-water technology. The will to work with citizens and their communities in its development will lay the groundwork for creating local solutions to threats to water sources.

One of the ways to continue the engagement of youth and communities in an action-oriented dialogue on water is to create youth jobs around water issues. Too often 'education' seems a code for more PhD's and knowledge workers: we need those, but we also need skilled technicians and technologists to build, run and maintain water systems.

*The Ripple Effect* youth water leaders have learned that in the next 20 years demand for water is going to exceed supply by 40%. They know that to whom much is given, much is expected. Ontario, with its significant access to the world's fresh water can lead – and continue to provide solutions.

In the recent throne speech, Dalton McGinty's Government has called to on us all to "make our province the clean water capital of North America." In total support of the youth leaders from Ontario communities, we call on the Government to think even bigger. Through harnessing the opportunities of innovation; employment and governance innovation, while addressing the significant threats to its quality, we believe Ontario can and should lead the world as the clean water capital.

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