



## OFS Canada JPIC Communiqué JPIC June 2021

### Indigenous Life and Drinking Water Advisories

In his landmark 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis wrote, “LS 30. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity. This debt can be paid partly by an increase in funding to provide clean water and sanitary services among the poor.” *Fratelli Tutti* reinforcing the encyclical *Laudato Si'* where Pope Francis reminds us, “if everything is connected, it’s difficult to think about this world disaster as having no relationship with our own reality, pretending to be absolute masters of our own life and of everything that exists” (FT34). *In other words, it’s our problem too.* (See [GCCM summary](#)).



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In 2015, there were drinking water advisories in 126 First Nations. The Trudeau government committed to resolving them by March 2021, but they failed to provide all the funding required to meet that deadline. There are still advisories in 33 First Nation communities. The Council of Canadians tells us that “**a single drinking water advisory can mean as many as 5,000 people lack access to safe, clean drinking water.**”

We in our Canadian south with all our services and infrastructure were to lose access to our water for even a day we fall into crisis mode. Many of our Indigenous sisters and brothers live with this reality for months and years. Like with many other Indigenous issues they fall on deaf ears. As privileged people we need to lend our voices to their cries for justice.

**Indigenous Corporate Training Inc** wrote in its [2019 blog](#) that of key issues of greatest concern for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, access to [safe drinking water](#) is

number one. “How is it that people on-reserve have suffered through sometimes decades of having to boil water before drinking it, bathing in it, or cooking with it while neighboring communities enjoy safe, clean water? The answer lies in the fact that there are **no drinking water regulations** for reserves. There are guidelines, protocols, and lots of information about how to what to do and not to do under a DWA but no regulations.”

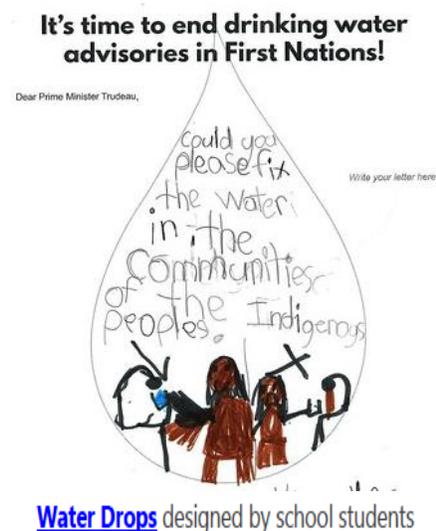
Many of the on-reserve water systems have not been updated to meet the demands of a growing population. Additional on-reserve housing units cannot be added without upgrades to the water and wastewater infrastructure. Overcrowding in on-reserve housing is common on many reserves which places extra strain on inadequate sanitation systems.

**Auditor General:** In her [February 2021 audit report](#), Canada’s Auditor General Karen Hogan said many First Nations will continue to live without access to clean water without long-term solutions to address deficiencies in their water systems. The auditor general found that since the prime minister made that commitment, 100 advisories have been lifted. But 60 remained in effect in 41 First Nations communities as of November 2020, and some communities won't be able to get clean water out of their taps for many years.

Indigenous Services Canada had not amended the operations and maintenance funding formula for First Nations water systems since it was first developed 30 years ago and a salary gap contributed to problems in retaining qualified water system operators (*a key factor in keeping the system in good order once built*).

**The Council of Canadians** in their [Safe Water for First Nations](#) state, “... the Liberal government has been promoting public-private partnerships (P3s) as a solution. History has shown that P3s cost more, they lead to the privatization of water, and a loss of community control and jobs. P3s are not the answer to the drinking water crisis in First Nations.

Finally in the document [Aqua fons vitae – Orientations on Water from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development](#) (Vatican, March 2020) it states, “Water is a source of life... and is vital for all forms of life. ... water is a largely cross-cutting element, and affects the achievement of the common good of the entire human family and of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 ... and... expresses concern about the slow progress with respect to the realization of the universal human right to safe drinking water and sanitation which,



almost 10 years after the well-known Resolution 64/292 of the United Nations General Assembly, remains merely declaratory, and not even so in certain States.”

In considering the fundamental role of water in creation and in human development, we feel the need to thank You with Francis of Assisi for “sister water”, simple and useful for life like nothing else on our planet.

## Canada's Water Crisis: Indigenous Families at Risk

*Click on the image below to see the video (4.29)*



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Arnqpnm70Ng>

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