

**Submission for the  
POSITIVE AWARD  
2006**

**Filed by: REDES (Red de Ecología Social-  
Amigos de la Tierra Uruguay) and FFOSE  
(Federación de Funcionarios de las Obras  
Sanitarias del Estado)**

## **Comisión Nacional en Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (CNDAV)**

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Headquarters:        | Montevideo, Uruguay   |
| Established:         | 2002  |
| Website:             | <a href="http://www.ffose.org.uy/aguayvida/">www.ffose.org.uy/aguayvida/</a>  |
| Number of employees: | n/a   |
| Number of members:   | ~30 grassroots organizations, NGOs, labour unions and political parties.  |
| Area of activity:    | Promotion of the fundamental human right to water.  |
| Main objectives:     | The CNDAV has been founded to line up a constitutional reform which bans the privatisation of water. On 31 October 2004 this reform has been agreed to in a plebiscite. Since then the CNDAV monitors the compliance with the reform and tries to embrace the population in water management. |

### **Summary**

*The Comisión Nacional en Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (CNDAV), a broad coalition of social and political organisations, successfully campaigned to include the right of access to drinking water and the right of an efficient sewage system as fundamental human rights in the Uruguayan constitution. Since the successful plebiscite, the CNDAV stands up for the definitive cancellation of the concessions of Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux and Aguas de Bilbao which have privatized the delivery of water and sewage services in Uruguay..*

### **Reasons for the submission**

In order to obtain loans from the International Monetary Fund, Uruguay agreed in the beginning of 2000 to privatize water and sanitation services. The winners of these privatisations were the corporations Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux (France) and Aguas de Bilbao (Spain). The population of Uruguay, however, paid dearly. Sharply increased water prices which denied poorer segments of population access to the drinking water supply and a deterioration of drinking water quality were only some of the negative consequences of privatisation.

The Comisión Nacional en Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (National Commission for the Defence of Water and Life, or the CNDAV) was established in 2002 as a reaction to privatisations and their negative impact on humans and the environment. The goal of the coalition and its campaign was to include access to drinking water and an efficient sewage system as fundamental human rights in the Uruguayan constitution. By achieving this, the CNDAV laid the groundwork for the public management of water resources based on social participation and sustainability. Furthermore, the

CNDAV serves as a platform of complaint and denunciation against the presence of Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux and Aguas de Bilbao in Uruguay.

The Uruguayan electoral system requires that constitutional reform prompted by a citizens' initiative must have the support of 10% of the electorate to be considered by citizens as a whole. Therefore the CNDAV had to convince eligible voters of the importance of their concerns. After collecting the necessary signatures, the CNDAV started a broad campaign to prepare the electorate for the popular vote (plebiscite). This happened through numerous local workshops, media work on the regional, national and international levels and diverse road shows.

### **Results of the campaign**

Despite an intense counter-campaign by affected multinational corporations and conservative business sectors, the CNDAV seized victory in the plebiscite. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2004, 65% of the electorate voted in favour of the constitutional reform. For the first time ever, access to drinking water and an efficient sewage system were included as fundamental human rights in a national constitution. Since then, the Uruguayan constitution contains an amendment which regulates the public management of water and sanitation services based on social participation and sustainability.

According to REDES (Amigos de la Tierra Uruguay), the use of various communication strategies was a crucial element of the campaign. With slogans such as "Water Belongs to Everybody" and "In Defence of Water and Life", the campaign convinced a large majority of the electorate. A broad coalition of more than 30 grassroots organisations, NGOs, labour unions and political parties played an important role in this successful endeavour, which also enjoyed the support of more than 100 organisations and individuals from abroad.

### **What happens next?**

Since the plebiscite, the CNDAV continues to fight for the definitive cancellation of the concessions of Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux and Aguas de Bilbao. These two corporations have threatened to take legal action using bilateral investment agreements should Uruguay declare the concessions terminated. But this is what the state is obliged to do after the constitutional amendment entered into force. The CNDAV is defending the constitutional reform and is planning nationwide workshops to discuss the mechanisms of participative water administration.

**Detailed submission:** [www.publiceye.ch/nominierungen](http://www.publiceye.ch/nominierungen)

Further information and links:

- [www.redes.org.uy/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=index&catid=4&topic=](http://www.redes.org.uy/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=index&catid=4&topic=)
- [www.ffose.org.uy/aguayvida/](http://www.ffose.org.uy/aguayvida/)