

# Water is a right, youths say

Group wants backing from Harper

By DAVID LIPSON, SUN MEDIA

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A group of Toronto youth will tell Prime Minister Stephen Harper that water is more than just a commodity.

"This is not an issue of economics, or politics, or anything like that," said Shire Brandi, 20, a member of the Youth4Water committee. "This is an issue of survival and it's a necessity in life -- a human right."

The group wants Canada to sign on to UN General Comment, No.15, which would recognize water as basic human right.

Youth4Water, a collaboration of the United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC), Toronto Community Housing and the Institute at Havergal College, is spreading its message in a campaign that takes them to Parliament Hill next March.

## ACCESS 'A RIGHT'

"It's not calling for Canada to solve the water problem for the world," said UNAC executive director Kathryn White. "But to simply recognize that decent and dignified access to water and sanitation ought to be a right to anyone."

The World Health Organization says water scarcity affects four of every 10 people and that by 2025, almost 2 billion people will be living in areas with water shortages.

"Here in Canada we don't have a good understanding of the issue," said Brandi. "I say this because we are so blessed with the amount of water we have and our natural resources -- people don't know that there are rural communities in Canada that don't have access to water."

## FACT-FINDING

The Youth4Water crew has witnessed the world's water problems on its travels that have taken them from Walkerton, Ont. -- where tainted water killed seven people and sickened more than 2,300 in 2000 -- to a conference in Zaragoza, Spain.

Walkerton taught the group that Canada is not immune to waterborne diseases. Health issues directly related to water pollution cost Canada \$300 million annually, Environment Canada said.

Since the project began in 2007, Youth4Water has been holding workshops to educate teenagers.

"At the moment (students) think water is just something that comes out of a tap," said group member Christine Moon, 16. "They don't really connect it with anything outside of their own world by taking long showers, running the tap when brushing teeth -- these kinds of things a lot of people do without thinking."

The campaign goes into top gear tonight when Youth4Water will premiere its documentary, Water is a Matter of Survival, at the Scadding Court Community Centre on Dundas St. West.

A petition to Stephen Harper will also be unveiled to recognize water as a basic human right.