El Salvador: paid over $24 million in legal costs to defend against a lawsuit by an Australian company after rejecting a mining permit over water concerns.

Canada: paid $131 million to American pulp and paper giant AbitibiBowater for water rights.

Argentina: ordered to pay the French water utility giant Suez $405 million.

Estonia: facing a $140 million lawsuit filed by UK-based United Utilities over a cap on water rate increases.

Romania: being sued for $4 billion by a Canadian gold mining company over a lake of cyanide-contaminated water.

Bolivia: being sued by a Canadian mining company for $386 million.

Panama: being sued for $268 million by an American company for refusing to extend mining rights on a newly created reserve.

Colombia: being sued by a Canadian mining company for $386 million.

Slovakia: being sued for $100 million after refusing to allow a bulk water export pipeline to a factory in Poland.

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All figures in Canadian Dollars.

Trade agreements commonly investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provisions, which grant investors the right to sue foreign governments if they introduce new laws or regulations – be they environmental, health or human rights – that cause the investor to lose money.

Corporations vs. Governments

 Corporations are winning 60% of ISDS cases, compared to only 40% for governments.

"Modern free trade and investment agreements impede the ability of people and their governments to maintain environmental laws and regulations to protect their water."

- Maude Barlow

The global annual market for water will be worth just under $300 billion by 2020. Trade agreements help large multinational corporations lock in these profits and take away the ability of governments to protect public water. That’s why more than 3.5 million Europeans signed a petition against CETA and TTIP – to stop these agreements before they start.

Studies show that private water utilities cut jobs and services, skirt pollution rules and raise water rates. A 2016 Survey of 500 U.S. communities found that private water systems charge 58% more than public ones.

Once water is used in a product or service – as a beverage, or for industry, municipal water systems or hydroelectricity – it becomes a “tradeable good,” subject to international trade law.

The “ratchet” clause in modern trade agreements requires governments to maintain a level of privatization once the agreements are signed, increasing their vulnerability to investors.

However... Under World Trade Organization rules, no country can impose any “prohibition or restriction” on the export of a tradeable good.

The world’s largest water utilities are controlled by three companies: United Water, Veolia Environment and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux. Together they control $77 billion in assets around the world. In Suez Lyonnaise alone, 50,000 workers have seen their contracts terminated.

Studies show that 90% of the worst water quality in the United States occurs in the 25% of communities served by privatized water systems.

There are now over 3,500 ISDS agreements in the world!