



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Restricted

Original: English

19 November 2010

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Forty-fifth session

Geneva, 1-19 November 2010

Statement on the Right to Sanitation

1. Lack of access to sanitation affects human dignity and undermines the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. Until recently, sanitation was a largely neglected topic, though gradually it has begun to receive more attention.
2. At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, a target on sanitation was added to the Millennium Development Goals emphasizing that reducing the number of people without access to sanitation is as fundamentally important as the other MDG targets. In order to raise awareness of, and to accelerate progress towards, that target, the UN General Assembly declared the year 2008 the International Year of Sanitation. The Human Rights Council, in turn, by Resolution A/HRC/RES/15/9 of 06 October 2010, reaffirmed the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation recognized by the General Assembly on 28 July 2010.
3. However, despite these positive developments, the world is clearly not making sufficient progress. Sanitation is one of the most off-track targets of the Millennium Development Goals, and recent estimates have shown that between 2006 and 2008 an additional 100 million people were left without access to improved sanitation. Recognizing this fact, Governments were called upon to redouble efforts to close the sanitation gap, in the outcome document of the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly held in September 2010 on the theme "Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals".
4. 2.6 billion people do not have access to improved sanitation and over a billion people still have no option but to practice open defecation. In developing countries, as much as 80 % of wastewater is untreated and goes directly into lakes, rivers and oceans (WWDR, 2009, p. 141). As a direct consequence of this, diarrhoea is the second biggest cause of death of children under the age of five. Girls and boys do not attend school because they fall prey to diseases caused by inadequate sanitation.
5. Moreover, girls do not go to school in many parts of the world for lack of toilets, or lack of separate toilets for them. People living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by lack of access to sanitation. Recent research estimates that, for every dollar invested in sanitation, there is about a nine-dollar long-term benefit in costs averted and productivity gained.
6. The Committee, being fully aware of the relevance of sanitation for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living, has regularly raised the issue of sanitation in its dialogue with States Parties and made specific reference to it in several of its General Comments.

7. The Committee reaffirms that, since sanitation is fundamental for human survival and for leading a life in dignity, the right to sanitation is an essential component of the right to an adequate standard of living, enshrined in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to sanitation is also integrally related, among other Covenant rights, to the right to health, as laid down in Article 12 paragraphs 1 and 2 (a), (b) and (c), the right to housing, in Article 11, as well as the right to water, which the Committee recognized in its General Comment No. 15. It is significant, however, that sanitation has distinct features which warrant its separate treatment from water in some respects. Although much of the world relies on waterborne sanitation, increasingly sanitation solutions which do not use water are being promoted and encouraged.

8. In line with the definition of sanitation as proposed by the Independent Expert on water and sanitation as “a system for the collection, transport, treatment and disposal or re-use of human excreta and associated hygiene”, States must ensure that everyone, without discrimination, has physical and affordable access to sanitation, “in all spheres of life, which is safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable, provides privacy and ensures dignity”. The Committee is of the view that the right to sanitation requires full recognition by States parties in compliance with the human rights principles related to non-discrimination, gender equality, participation and accountability.

Geneva, 19 November 2010
