

# Indifference, the enemy as sanitation crisis on sidelines at UN summit

Lack of focus on health crisis highlights need for broader support of UK-Dutch framework for action



**For immediate release, 25<sup>th</sup> September:** Despite yesterday's positive announcement from the UK and Dutch Governments of a 'global framework for action' to boost efforts to meet the sanitation and water MDG targets, most world leaders today displayed a continued neglect of one of the world's greatest health and development challenges.

With leaders focusing most activity on commitments for health, education and agriculture, the 2.5 billion people worldwide who lack access to a safe toilet were left with much less to cheer. Steve Cockburn, Coordinator of End Water Poverty, an international coalition of over 100 civil society organisations said:

*"Too many leaders failed to acknowledge the simple fact that without rapid progress on sanitation and water it will be impossible to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Thousands of children will continue to die each day from preventable diseases, children will remain out of school and the daily lives of women will continue to be blighted."*

*"The indifference towards a crisis that is so fundamental to the fight against poverty - and one that is consistently prioritised by poor communities themselves - shows just how much is wrong with the way the world approaches development."*

*"It also demonstrates the clear need to strengthen the UK and Dutch initiative, bring other leaders on board, and take concerted action to end the global sanitation and water crisis".*

The formal part of the UN High-Level Event on the MDGs was opened by the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who spoke of "indifference" as the greatest enemy in the battle against poverty.

Yesterday the UK and Netherlands announced their support for a 'global framework for action' to drive progress in the sector. It included commitments to establish an annual review and high-level meeting to drive progress in the sector and an extra €100m over 5 years to develop national plans in 20 countries.

End Water Poverty welcomed the announcement as a positive step forward, but warned that more partners and much greater funding would be needed to make a real impact on the sanitation and water crisis.

Globally 2.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation and almost 900 million people lack access to clean water. On current trends the MDG target to halve the proportion of people without access to sanitation – set for 2015 – will not be achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa until 2108.

Ends

## Media Fact Sheet



### Sanitation and Water – the missing link in international health and development

The United Nations has declared 2008 the International Year of Sanitation in recognition of the scale of the crisis. Over 2.5 billion people - 40% of the world's population - do not have a safe, clean or private place to go to the toilet. Almost 900 million people do not have access to clean drinking water. The resulting diarrhoeal diseases kill 5000 children every day, five times the number of deaths from HIV/AIDS.<sup>1</sup> This global crisis is undermining all development efforts and particularly efforts to reduce the number of children who die before their fifth birthday.

#### The human cost in health and development terms:

- A recent report by WaterAid highlighted evidence suggesting that poor sanitation could be the biggest cause of child deaths – **killing up to 2.4 million children each year** through its impact on diarrhea, pneumonia and malnutrition.<sup>2</sup>
- Children in homes with no toilet are **twice as likely to get diarrhea** as those with a toilet.<sup>3</sup>
- At any one time people suffering from diarrhea and other water-related diseases fill **half the hospital beds in developing countries**.<sup>4</sup>
- Each year millions of productive days are lost due to people being ill from diarrheal disease<sup>5</sup> which **costs sub-Saharan Africa 5% of its GDP**.<sup>6</sup>
- Investments are cost-effective. According to the 2006 UN Human Development Report, **every \$1 of investment in sanitation yields a \$9 economic return**.
- Each year over **443 million school days are lost** to water-related illness, undermining the aim of universal primary education, especially for girls.<sup>7</sup> Girls' attendance increases 11% with the provision of separate sanitary facilities in schools.<sup>8</sup>
- **The burden of this crisis falls most heavily on women** – with girls having to drop out of school to fetch water or because of poor sanitation facilities in adolescence, and women having to care for sick or dying children as well as spend hours fetching water.
- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed by world leaders in 2000, include a target to halve the number of people lacking access to safe water and sanitation by 2015. **On current trends the goal for sanitation will only be reached in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2108.**

#### Addressing the global sanitation crisis

End Water Poverty is calling on governments to act boldly by providing the institutions, finances and political will needed to meet the MDG targets. In particular, End Water Poverty is calling on leaders at the UN meeting to agree a global framework for action that includes:

- An annual review and high-level meeting to drive and monitor global progress in the sector
- The development of costed and coordinated national water and sanitation plans
- A commitment that no credible national plan should fail through a lack of finance

<sup>1</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report* (2006)

<sup>2</sup> WaterAid, *Tackling the Silent Killer – The Case for Sanitation* (2008)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/well/resources/Publications/Briefing%20Notes/BN%20Child%20Healthl.htm>

<sup>4</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report* (2006)

<sup>5</sup> Hutton, G. *et al.*, "Economic and health effects of increasing coverage of low cost water and sanitation interventions." *UNDP HDR Office Occasional Paper* (2006)

<sup>6</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report* (2006)

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report* (2006)

<sup>8</sup> IYS Advocacy Kit, UN-Water 2008, Factsheet 2.