



Statement

by

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Deputy Chef de Cabinet of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

on behalf of

the President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

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World Toilet Day

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

General Assembly Resolution 67/291 has designated November 19th as a day for promoting international attention and action toward ensuring that every person on this planet has access to basic sanitation services, symbolized by the toilet.

At the heart of this symbolic day is Millennium Development Goal # 7, which affirms the commitment of our Heads of State to halve the proportion of the population that does not have access to basic sanitation by 2015. When our Heads of State met in New York on September 23rd to review the status of implementation of the MDGs, their judgment with regard to basic sanitation was sobering: at the current rate of progress, they found that the world will fall short of the sanitation target by 2015. The good news is that in general, the basic sanitation situation in the developing world has improved; however, in some areas it has not.

While, 48% of the overall population in developing regions was without access to basic sanitation in 2008, in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, the numbers rose to 69% and 64% respectively. Furthermore, the sanitation practice that posed the greatest threat to human health, was open defecation - in other words, the lack of toilet facilities.

The grim situation of lacking sanitation services does not have the raw naked force of an earthquake, hurricane or a forest fire, yet its effects are no less deadly. In this regard, President Ashe, who is away on official duty, and on whose behalf I speak, recalls the appeal made by our Deputy Secretary General for the international community to combine efforts to end open defecation by 2025. As a practical measure, UN Funds, Programmes and Organizations such UNICEF, WHO and PAHO could play a useful advocacy role.

In the absence of proper sanitation, open defecation pollutes the air, the land, the wells and the waterways. The net result is that the most vulnerable, our young children, fall victim to a raft of preventable intestinal and other diseases.

It would be bad enough if this were only a public health phenomenon, but the impacts are much greater, resulting in significant loss of productivity in the economies of the countries concerned. The costs of inadequate sanitation often account for several percentage points of GDP loss.

Lack of sanitation also adversely affects women, who must give birth to children without the benefit of clean running water; walk for miles each day to collect, at best, barely potable water for their family's use; expose themselves to sexual abuse as they do so; keep watch at the bedside of their children suffering from the ravages of diarrhoea or some other preventable water-borne disease; watch them suffer, willing them, often in vain, to draw just one more breath after the other...

Indeed the lack of basic sanitation is one of the most dramatic manifestations of our world's gross inequities, which absolutely needs to be addressed in the Post-2015 development agenda.

Against such a background, promoting access to sanitation as per the adoption of Resolution 67/291, is of the most critical importance and the Mission of Singapore deserves credit for arranging today's event.

As you all know, the PGA has proclaimed his theme for this 68th Session to be the Post 2015 Development Agenda – Setting the Stage. For President Ashe, the term “development” is not to be understood in the limited Third World sense of emerging out of under-development. In his mind, development is to be conceived as relating to all countries, all peoples, whatever their standard of living.

Seen in this light, the fundamental concerns of development must, of necessity include the enjoyment, especially by the poor of our world, of their human rights, including sustainable living in the form of health, clean air, clean water and access to sanitation; in a single word: toilets.

This inaugural commemoration of World Toilet day, and the kinds of follow-up activities it will spawn, coincides well the President's proposed Thematic Debate on Water, sanitation and sustainable energy in the Post2015 Development agenda.

President Ashe is particularly pleased that this inaugural commemoration of World Toilet Day includes exchanging ideas about how to bring about the change we all wish to see regarding

enjoyment of the human right to basic sanitation. He is hopeful that today's Seminar will lead to useful, workable ideas on a number of specific topics, which can provide greater substance and clarity to next year's Thematic Debate.

This Seminar can also, inter alia:

- i) help to underscore the essential links between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development;
- ii) identify ways to heighten global sensitivity to the plight of those living without basic sanitation - not simply as a public health issue but as a fundamental development concern;
- iii) help to strengthen the sense of a planetary community, which is the bedrock of the Post-2015 Development agenda, and as a result;
- iv) exert pressure for the forging of a strong political will, particularly on the part of the developed countries, to make the necessary resources available for bringing about desired improvements in water and sanitation for the regions most in need;
- v) examine what resources might be released by households and affected communities for achieving the above objectives;
- vi) stimulate discussions on establishing a partnership arrangement involving governments, civil society organizations, WHO, UNICEF and other relevant stakeholders, which would elaborate a practical action-oriented programme of action for bringing about meaningful change in the area of water and sanitation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For those of us in this room, the toilet is most likely something we take for granted each and every day. For many others, access to quality sanitation remains out of reach with dire consequences. Today, let's commit to finding innovative ideas on how to redress this imbalance so that all people have the same rights to good health, dignity and decency.

I wish you great success in your discussions.

Thank you.