



**Speech by the Chair of UNSGAB, His Royal Highness Prince  
Willem-Alexander, Prince of Orange, Chair of United Nations'  
Secretary General Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation**

**Round table on Health and Education, High-Level Event,  
UN headquarters, New York, 25 September 2008**

Mr/Madam Chair, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies  
and gentlemen,

As chairman of his advisory board on water and sanitation I feel  
privileged that the Secretary-General offered me the opportunity to  
speak at one of the Round Tables, especially as he also allowed me  
to choose which discussion I wished to address. This shows that he  
shares my concern about the water and sanitation crisis, suffered by  
more than 40% of the World's population.

You might think I am in the wrong room right now and should be speaking at roundtable number 3 on Environmental Sustainability which is where MDG 7 target 3 would seem to belong with conventional wisdom prevailing. I prefer a more unconventional out of the box approach and chose this Round Table – on Health and Education – to speak about water and sanitation because you cannot achieve the MDG's in these areas without improving water, sanitation and hygiene. The lack of access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation causes lasting negative effects on the health and development of human lives. Those effects will only increase if we do not intervene.

Medical practitioners, the very people that have to help us achieve our MDG's, voted sanitation and its impact on public health the greatest medical advance of the last 160 years! According to a survey in the British Medical Journal this elementary form of sustainable preventive healthcare beat all wonders of modern curative healthcare which has become increasingly unsustainable for the developed world, not even to mention its impact on budgets of developing countries!

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The sanitation target is linked to health and education in so many ways. MDG 4 for instance, reducing child mortality: it is estimated that the lack of access to sanitation causes at least a quarter of all child deaths in the developing world. MDG 5 speaks of improving maternal

health: the World Health Organisation calculates the impact of the lack of safe drinking water and basic sanitation to be around 529,000 maternal deaths a year. And MDG 6 is aimed at combating diseases: WHO estimates that improving water, sanitation and hygiene has the potential to prevent at least nine per cent of the disease burden.

Besides these synergies with health, we can see an unmistakable relationship between education and the targets on water and sanitation. To achieve MDG 2, universal primary education: by meeting the water and sanitation targets, an estimated 272 million school days would be recovered which are currently missed by school children suffering the effects of waterborne or sanitation-related diseases and related problems.

As long as young girls still have to spend almost all day collecting water for the family, they cannot even think about going to school. Even if they can attend, there is still the issue of sanitation to consider. In some rural areas in Asia, for example, more than fifty per cent of all girls drop out of school in second and third grade because there are no sanitary facilities. Inadequate sanitation in school significantly reduces girls' attendance. This is particularly tragic, because girls' education has a major impact on the survival of their future children. If we could only offer girls clean, private toilets, we could keep them in school. Last, but not least: people need to be educated about the importance of hygiene for their health. If they are not aware of the risks they cannot reduce them.

The same is true for women's empowerment. MDG 3 is about gender equality and improving the position of women: women and girls suffer particularly from a lack of access to water and sanitation. We should not underestimate the importance of dignity. There are many examples which show that self-esteem begins with having proper, safe toilet facilities. And confident women, playing an active role in their community, are the best guarantee of advancing progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

So how do we expect to reach any of the MDGs without decent water supplies and sanitation? The answer, ladies and gentlemen, is that we can't.

The world is on track to meet its drinking water target but there is still a long way to go towards reaching the target on sanitation. Fast action is required, but sanitation is about more than just building toilets. Too often in the past, sanitation facilities have been built and then left abandoned. The focus must be on demand-driven approaches that promote the benefits of installing household toilets. Possible ways to create demand include hygiene education at school, mass-media campaigns, demonstration latrines and exploiting community pressure and community dynamics to eliminate defecation out in the open.

Ladies and gentlemen, it genuinely upsets me that young children and women living in slums still have to relieve themselves in stinking gutters in the street every day. We cannot accept this! Nor can we accept the high rates of urological diseases contracted only because women in rural areas have to wait until sunset to find a bush or distant field to relieve themselves, running huge risks of physical abuse or rape.

Everybody deserves a life of health and development. If we do not act to make this happen we will never achieve sustainability and progress in development. Therefore I welcome the calls for a more concerted 'global framework for action' amongst donors, recipient countries and international organisations, which were made at yesterday's side event on water and sanitation. I will pursue that these proposals are reviewed by the UNSGAB working groups.

Our common end goal is a world in which all people have an equal chance of health, dignity and development. I would like to extend that to include water and sanitation for all. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, as unanimously adopted by our visionary leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, is a milestone along the road that the world cannot afford to miss.

Thank you.