

## Workshop Series: International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015

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### First Workshop: 7 February 2012. Saragossa, Spain. Experts' Dialogue on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation

#### Experts

**Antonio Embid.** Professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Zaragoza, Spain.

**Robert Bos.** Coordinator of water, sanitation, hygiene, and health at the World Health Organization (WHO)

#### Moderated by

**Jaime Hermida.** Deputy Director of the Office of Multilateral Affairs, Office of Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain.

#### Water and sanitation as a priority

- When financing is scarce there is need to prioritize their use. To achieve basic water and sanitation coverage objectives it is necessary that it is a sufficient public policy priority.
- Giving priority to water and sanitation services should not be a concern only of governments or experts, but one that is the responsibility of all stakeholders.
- A Global Civic Diplomacy can be created in order to fight short-termism and particularism that significantly affects decision making. We should not leave everything only in the governments' hands and we must seize the opportunities presented at Rio +20.

#### Progressiveness

- It has to be recognized and respected the progressive character of implementation, not only of the right to water and sanitation but of any right. This is a process that needs time to settle and especially to be assimilated.
- The State has an obligation of progressive realization and non-discrimination. It is important to overcome the debate about whether water and sanitation constitute a human

right or not. The fact that it is listed as such by consensus and not by majority leaves the problem partially solved.

- The question is also to extract the potential of institutionalization and the rule of law so that citizens are really protected through an independent judiciary.

### **Useful experiences**

- Training is being provided to Asian countries with the Asian Development Bank. The Bank is willing to include as a condition of their investment plans, the water quality aspect and water safety plans in their criteria for granting loans to countries.
- In Spain, thanks to the development of technology, the irrigation channels built hundred years ago keep supplying water to the big urban areas. Nowadays, they mostly transport water for personal use rather than for irrigation.

### **The role of education**

- The lack of water and sanitation in schools is a recoil factor and a collective crisis. Illnesses caused by this situation undermine the universal right to education. It is therefore essential to draw a link between water, health and education.
- Schools can also function as key areas of change generation by passing on useful knowledge for life in health and hygiene.

### **Water and sanitation as a right or as merchandise?**

- Access to drinking water and basic sanitation as a right entails that water and sanitation facilities and services should be available and accessible to everybody, including the poorest.
- The right to water and sanitation implies that the cost of water and sanitation services should not exceed 5% of the household income, i.e., the services must not affect the ability of people to buy other goods and services such as food, housing, health services and education.
- In the water realm, the involvement of the private sector has been seen as a way to foster investment, improve service delivery, etc. This is done through concession contracts, by which the State contracts a private company to operate the water service while retaining ownership of it.
- It has been suggested that this model actually requires applying the principles of cost recovery and profit maximization, and this may not be compatible with the provision of services to the poor, who are those who lack services' coverage.