

General Assembly declares access to clean water and sanitation is a human right



28 July 2010 – Safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights, the General Assembly declared today, voicing deep concern that almost 900 million people worldwide do not have access to clean water.

The 192-member Assembly also called on United Nations Member States and international organizations to offer funding, technology and other resources to help poorer countries scale up their efforts to provide clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for everyone.

The Assembly resolution received 122 votes in favour and zero votes against, while 41 countries abstained from voting.

The text of the resolution expresses deep concern that an estimated 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water and a total of more than 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation. Studies also indicate about 1.5 million children under the age of five die each year and 443 million school days are lost because of water- and sanitation-related diseases.

Today's resolution also welcomes the UN Human Rights Council's request that Catarina de Albuquerque, the UN Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, report annually to the General Assembly as well.

Ms. de Albuquerque's report will focus on the principal challenges to achieving the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation, as well as on progress towards the relevant Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**).

The MDGs, a series of targets for reducing social and economic ills, all by 2015, includes the goals of halving the proportion of people who cannot reach or afford safe drinking water and halving the number who do not have basic sanitation.

In a related development, Ms. de Albuquerque issued a statement today after wrapping up a nine-day official visit to Japan in which she praised the country for its nearly universal access to water and sanitation and for its use of innovative technologies to promote hygiene and treat wastewater.

But the Independent Expert said she was shocked that some members of the Utoro community near Kyoto, where Koreans have been living for several generations, still do not have access to water from the public network.

"People are also not connected to the sewage network, despite the fact that the surrounding area is largely covered by sewage service," she said. "When floods occur, as happened one year ago, the lack of sewage and proper evacuation of grey water result in contamination of the environment, including with human faeces, posing serious health concerns.

"I am also worried that water and sanitation are extremely expensive for some people living in Utoro, who reportedly do not have a right to receive a pension."

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER, SANITATION
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/ga10967.doc.htm>