

High Level Forum Calls for Improved Targeting of Aid for Sanitation and Water, Donor Coordination, and Practical Solutions

Financial Commitments and Coordinated Action Needed to Trigger Positive Outcomes for Water and Sanitation Sector

Washington D.C. / USA, April 28, 2010 – Finance and Water Sector Ministers representing 18 countries met Friday with representatives of 13 donors, seven UN agencies and civil society for the First Annual High Level Meeting (HLM) of Sanitation and Water for All. The meeting, held at the World Bank, was hosted by UNICEF on behalf of the new Sanitation and Water for All partnership, and aimed to shape sector dialogue and to stimulate aid targeting, donor coordination, and on-the-ground action to ensure access to sanitation and safe drinking water for the billions who have none.

The meeting was co-chaired by HRH Prince Willem-Alexander from the Netherlands, Chair of the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation and Mr. Saad Houry, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. Event participants took stock of progress, shared best practices, explored the linkages between water, sanitation, economic growth and health, and committed to addressing appropriate allocations for these basic services.

Hon. Buyelwa Patience Sonjica, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, South Africa and Chair of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), on behalf of the 15 water and sanitation Ministers in attendance, specifically urged donors to increase the percentage of sector aid allocations to basic services from the current 16% to 27% and the percentage of sector aid going to low-income countries from 42% to 50%.

She noted that sixty Africans die every hour because of water-related diseases, and an estimated 672 million have no access to safe drinking-water. To address what she described as an untenable situation with staggering health, social, and economic impacts, participants needed to "stop talking and start acting. We have the capacity and commitment to turn this situation around. It is a matter of life and death."

Citing the Secretary of State Clinton's recent "water defines our planet" statement, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero explained that for the US, water is a global imperative and one of the most pressing foreign policy challenges of the 21st century, and that the US is ramping up its efforts to build capacity, strengthen diplomatic efforts, build political will, mobilize support, and harness water and sanitation technologies, in addition to proposing a multi-donor technical assistance mechanism.

"No one country can address the challenges alone. Each must take responsibility for local and regional solutions, investing in people, infrastructure, and cutting-edge technologies. Sound water and sanitation sector planning and strategic donor planning and coordination are also needed," she explained. She challenged donors to better align their assistance to national priorities and to work with partners, and she challenged all meeting participants to leave with greater resolve and to translate words into concrete action on the ground.

Dr. Maria Neira, Director of the Department of Public Health and Environment at the World Health Organization (WHO) presented findings and analysis from the UN-Water Global Annual Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) to provide context and inform the deliberations. "Forty percent of the global population is without access to basic sanitation and 13% without access to safe drinking-water. This trend cannot continue. We need to improve and target investments, make the most of limited resources, and push for stronger partnerships and better donor coordination. It's time for committed involvement by all parties," she said. "The economic case for sanitation and drinking-water is no longer in doubt. It is the key to development, human progress and dignity. Water defines our health, and for WHO, there is no health without sanitation and drinking water."

"There is clearly a shift in sector dialogue indicating that water and sanitation are the missing link in achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals. In preparation for this meeting, Ministries of Finance in 18 countries worked with Ministers responsible for sanitation and water to examine current progress, determine national budget allocations and identify investment gaps," explained Clarissa Brocklehurst, UNICEF Chief of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). "This process has engaged government officials at the highest levels and increased their knowledge and understanding of the economic impacts of sector investments and the huge potential benefits for public health, gender equity, poverty reduction and economic growth," she said.

Overall, the High Level Meeting participants called for more synergies and commitment, continued dialogue, better use of resources, capacity building, human resource development, increased water and sanitation sector planning, public-private partnerships, development of integrated approaches, and evidence-based decision-making.

As a framework for action, Sanitation and Water for All will serve as a means to coordinate efforts globally and link those efforts to country level dialogue and actions. Commitments from this first annual meeting have been documented and the GLAAS report will be one of the mechanisms partners use to monitor these commitments and progress over time.

"This event is a testament to the seriousness of our intention to chart a new course for the sector. Sanitation and water are a cornerstone of development and crucial to ensuring the survival and development of children. The sector needs more attention, more investments, and better targeting of those investments," noted UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Saad Houry.

For further information please visit: http://www.unwater.org/activities_san4all.html

About Sanitation and Water for All

Sanitation and Water for All is a global partnership aimed at achieving universal and sustainable access to sanitation and drinking-water for all, by firmly placing sanitation and water on the global agenda with an immediate focus on achieving the MDGs in the most off-track countries.

Please visit:

http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/glaas

<http://www.unicef.org/>

http://www.unwater.org/activities_san4all.html

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