



Dear Mr. Heckner,

Helvetas, Bread for all and Amnesty International Switzerland would like to draw your attention to the ongoing negotiations in the UN General Assembly relating to a draft resolution presented by Bolivia on The Human Right to Water and Sanitation.

As Swiss development and human rights organisations that

- support local communities in the Global South in the realization of their right to food and water including the right to sanitation
- implement or support projects providing access to drinking water to people in the South
- raise awareness within the Swiss population and
- address political and economic decision makers – directly and through the Swiss NGO working group on water of which we are members

the right to water and sanitation is a huge concern for us.

We appreciate your commitment concerning the right to water and we therefore urge you to initiate and express, in the context of negotiations on the draft resolution, your support at the General Assembly to:

- Re-affirm that the right to water is a universal human right (consistent with the interpretation of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).
- Refer to the work of the Human Rights Council's UN Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Any request in the resolution for a report should expressly invite the Independent Expert to contribute.
- Refer to the need for efforts towards the realisation of all Millennium Development Goals, including MDG 7, to be consistent with human rights. This is important in the context of the upcoming High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly in September on the Millennium Development Goals.

In Article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States parties "... recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing...". The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has clarified that the use of the word "including" indicates that the right to an adequate standard of living is not limited to food, clothing and housing. It has indicated that the right to water is also included within the right to an adequate standard of living since water is one of the most fundamental conditions for survival. In addition, the Human Rights Council Independent Expert on human rights obligations related to safe drinking water and sanitation has stated that there is considerable precedent for treating the right to sanitation as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living and has encouraged States to support broader recognition of sanitation as a human right.

On the basis of the discussions your department had with Amnesty International Switzerland and Alliance Sud on the issue, we urge you as well to :

- Recognise the right to sanitation as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living.

Sanitation is equally important as water, and arguably, the sanitation crisis is worse than the water crisis. There is agreed language from CEDAW (*Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*) referring to water and sanitation as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living. There have also been increasing references in international political declarations to sanitation as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living.

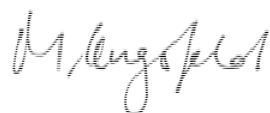
The 177 UN Member States that participated in the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the 171 States that participated in the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996 recognised that water and sanitation are components of the right to an adequate standard of living, alongside food, clothing, and housing. Several international declarations have recognized that water and sanitation are human rights. Specifically, the 118 members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the 47 members of the Council of Europe have recognised the right to water. In a series of recent declarations at the 2006 Africa-South America Summit (ASA), the 2007 Asia-Pacific Water Summit and the 2008 South Asian Conference on Sanitation, 106 States have recognised the rights to water and sanitation. As Africa, East and South Asia and Latin America contain the vast majority of the people lacking access to basic water and sanitation, it is important for all States – including those in the global North - to support efforts towards international recognition of the rights to water and sanitation. Such international recognition will facilitate international cooperation to support national efforts to realise the rights of those denied access to water and sanitation.

Referring to sanitation as a human right or as a component of a human right would give very important tools to NGOs in the field and would better empower them to make sure that the people who still have no access to sanitation keep their hopes alive and dream of getting access. It would be a step back and it would send the wrong message if we end up with a text recognising water as a human right, but not sanitation. It would send the message that we continue to care "more" about water than about sanitation , that sanitation has, once again, been neglected. Sanitation does desperately need the political impetus that such a General Assembly declaration could give.

Helvetas and Bread for all and Amnesty International Switzerland therefore urge your government, as a member of the UN General Assembly, to ensure that the resolution reflects and builds upon previous recognition of the rights to water and sanitation as components of the right to an adequate standard of living. Such recognition would help to increase the priority given to ensuring access to water and sanitation at the national level and in international cooperation. It would assist in efforts to meet MDG 7 which commits States to reduce by half the proportion of people unable to access safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Recognition of the right to sanitation is particularly critical. The MDG sanitation goal is among those that are significantly off-track. According to the World Health Organisation and UNICEF, 2.6 billion people currently do not have access to adequate sanitation. Sanitation often is neglected in development plans and in international assistance. Lack of access to adequate toilets (including latrines) is one of the primary causes of infant mortality and demeans the dignity of people denied such access. Lack of access to a toilet in or next to the home puts women at risk when they have to access facilities at night.

We thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Lengsfeld'.

Melchior Lengsfeld, Secretary General, Helvetas

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Beat Dietschy'.

Beat Dietschy, Secretary General, Bread for all

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Bolomey'.

Daniel Bolomey, Secretary General, Amnesty International Switzerland