

Global Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

Safe drinking water is not a luxury; it is life.

Recommendations: We urge the U.S. Executive branch to take a strong leadership role at the June 2009 G8 Summit and to call for immediate and invigorated action to address the global need for safe water and sanitation.

We request these points to be included in the G8 communiqué:

1. The recognition that sanitation and safe water are fundamental to human dignity and integral to human development. The dire state of the sanitation sector, in particular, threatens all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and particularly those in health and education.
2. The endorsement of and participation in the Global Framework for Action on Water and Sanitation, which includes a high-level annual review of progress of both donor and recipient government actions, analysis of systemic bottlenecks and remedial policies and action plans.
3. A commitment to encourage developing country governments to develop a national water and sanitation plan for their country.
4. A commitment that no credible national water and sanitation plan should fail through lack of finance.

Problem: An estimated 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water; 2.5 billion lack basic sanitation.¹ Evidence points to water and sanitation as perhaps the world's largest single cause of disease and as being critical to sustainable progress across a broad spectrum of development outcomes. More than 25 diseases are caused by inadequate water and sanitation, creating 10% of the global public health burden, killing more than 2 million people a year (including more children than AIDS, TB and malaria combined) and leading to 50% of the world's malnutrition. Diarrhea (a consequence of many of these 25+ diseases) sickens over 4 billion people each year and kills 1.5 million of them, 90% of whom are children under 5.²

The lack of access to safe water and sanitation undermines, as well, the sustainable achievement of all the MDGs, including child survival, improved maternal health, primary and secondary education, poverty reduction, women's empowerment and hunger alleviation.³

The overall situation is preventable today; there is no need to wait for vaccine discoveries or technological breakthroughs. Solutions are known and can be effectively implemented, given sufficient political will.

Safe water and improved sanitation provides a basic level of human security that, once reached, enables families and individuals to work to increase their standards of living (poverty reduction), educate their children and become better stewards of the environment. Water is also a growing strategic issue whose provision increases the likelihood of peaceful solutions to resource allocation concerns (e.g. in water-stressed and arid areas).

Effective support of safe drinking water and sanitation initiatives is a highly-visible, cost-effective, demand-driven and results-oriented approach to U.S. foreign assistance.

Background: The U.S. has shown leadership on this issue by the passage of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act in 2005.⁴ This Act, with overwhelming bipartisan support, made the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation in countries of greatest need a priority of U.S. foreign policy. Water and sanitation are the only targets of the MDGs that are now codified in U.S. law.

Although the recognition of the critical need for water and sanitation has been included in many communiqués from G8 Summits, including the 2003 Evian Water Action Plan and the 2005 Gleneagles Communiqué on Africa, there has been a notable lack of follow-up by the G8 countries on these commitments. The 2008 G8 Summit in Hokkaido Toyako acknowledged the need to accelerate the achievement of the internationally agreed goals on water and sanitation and pledged to reinvigorate their efforts to implement the Evian Plan and to review it on the basis of the Water Experts Group report to be prepared for the 2009 Summit in La Maddalena, Italy.⁵

The essential need for urgent action to address water and sanitation priorities is based on the following:

1. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals depends on providing sustainable, affordable safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene education.⁶

- “The combination of safe drinking water and hygienic sanitation facilities is a precondition for health and for success in the fight against poverty, hunger, child deaths and gender inequality. It is also central to the human rights and personal dignity of every woman, man and child on earth. The consequences of our collective failure to tackle this problem are dimmed prospects for the billions of people locked in a cycle of

poverty and disease.”⁷

- Lack of access to such basic human services creates one of the most ignored global health crises. The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 10% of the global health burden would be eliminated by the provision of services that people in the developed world take for granted: safe water and a toilet.
- Women are most often responsible for collecting water, often spending long hours carrying heavy loads of water back to their home. When water supplies are closer to home, women have more hours for their families and children, for more adequate rest and for engaging in economic activities.
- In strictly financial terms, the return on investment in water and sanitation cannot be overestimated: economic benefits range from \$3 to \$34 for each dollar invested⁸, depending on the nature of the intervention and the country. The cost of inaction is enormous; a recent study⁹ estimated that the financial losses due to poor sanitation and hygiene in four East Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam) amount to nearly \$2 billion per year, with wider economic and welfare impacts valued to \$9 billion, equivalent to 2% of combined GDP.

2. Climate change will exacerbate the existing safe drinking water crisis, requiring enhanced commitment by G8 countries to increase resilience and ameliorate these impacts.

- Changes in human activities and in the hydrological cycle, including drought and flooding, affect freshwater quantity and quality. Some parts of the world have already experienced extreme weather events due to climate change-related causes. Plans must be in place to address adaptation processes in the management of water resources.
- A 2007 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated, “Adaptation is needed now in order to reduce current vulnerability to the climate change that has already occurred and additional adaptation is needed in order to address the health risks projected to occur over the coming decades.”¹⁰

3. The hunger crisis and the water and sanitation crisis are inextricably linked.

- 50% of malnutrition is not caused by lack of food but by diseases associated with unsafe water and inadequate sanitation.¹¹ Adequate supplies of food will not keep malnutrition at bay when children suffer continual bouts of diarrhea triggered by poor sanitation, hygiene and unsafe water supplies. Because of debilitating, repetitive cases of diarrhea, the body is unable to absorb the nutrients in whatever food is available. This undermines investment in programs to tackle hunger.
- In the longer term, people are not healthy enough to participate in

agricultural activities to grow their own food if they are sick due to water- and sanitation-related illnesses.

4. Providing safe drinking water and sanitation improves stability and security.

- Leadership by the G8 countries in solving the global drinking water and sanitation crisis is more than a noble humanitarian gesture. It improves global security by helping desperate people who otherwise become targets for extreme ideologies. It complements military and economic strength with moral leadership which is more important than ever in our globally-connected society.
- Unsafe water prevents people – and societies – from realizing their full potential. Poor economic development and unclean water are clearly linked. In many countries the poor who lack access to water end up paying more for water than do the rich. In India alone, more than 73 million workdays are lost each year when workers become ill from dirty water. This type of thwarted economic and human development further entrenches poverty and increases the likelihood of political instability and violence.
- Access to water, sanitation, hygiene facilities and drainage are integral elements of safe, decent and adequate housing. Slum dwellers in cities in Africa and Asia are particularly affected. UN-Habitat estimates that as many as 150 million people in African cities lack adequate water supplies and 180 million lack adequate sanitation.¹²
- “As acute as the current predicament is, the forecasts suggest that the dimensions of the global water challenge may become even more pronounced. The number of people living in water-stressed countries could rise to more than 3.9 billion people – almost half the world population – by 2030. This growing scarcity of resources will likely generate new levels of tension at local, national, and even international levels.”¹³

As the international community targets the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the proportion of people without safe water and sanitation by 2015, both developing and developed countries must increasingly prioritize the provision of safe water and adequate sanitation. We encourage strong U.S. leadership at the G8 Summit calling for immediate and invigorated action to implement the existing G8 commitments to water and sanitation.

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This paper is not endorsed by the InterAction Board or its Members

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Living Water International	Millennium Water Alliance
Natural Resources Defense Council	Philadelphia Global Water Initiative
PSISafe Water International	WaterAid America
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Endnotes

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