

18 August 2008

**Speech by the HRH the Prince of Orange, Chair of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB)
18 August 2008, on the occasion of the World Water Week 2008, Stockholm**

International Year of Sanitation – Sanitation for all

Madam Chair, Mr President, Your Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It seems unthinkable now to let a year go by without visiting World Water Week in Stockholm. The annual SWWW is fixed in my calendar. I couldn't pass up this opportunity to address my colleagues here in Stockholm, although technically I am supposed to be in Beijing right now observing the Olympic Games in my capacity as a member of the IOC.

Speaking of the Games, did you know that Beijing has invested more than eight billion US dollars in sewers and waste water treatment? The air quality may still leave something to be desired, but the quality of Beijing's sanitation is impressive and sustainable.

I was also impressed with both the sporting performances and the atmosphere I witnessed at the Olympics. Everywhere you go, you can feel the competitors' spirit and enthusiasm. They all have their hearts set on a medal – preferably gold of course! That passion drives the participants, but it also unites them, creating an atmosphere of common understanding and harmony.

I see similarities between these athletes and yourselves. You show the same commitment and willpower. And the Olympic Dream is also your dream: 'to strive for a bright future of mankind'.

'One world, one dream.' A world in which everyone can lead a healthy life in dignity. A world that offers the chance of personal development for all. This is our common dream.

And like the Olympians in Beijing, you are truly determined. For years, you have been working to achieve MDG7 target 10. And now we are seeing the results. According to the 2008 JMP report, published by WHO/UNICEF, the number of people living without a supply of improved drinking water has now dropped well below one billion!

More than half the global population now have water piped to their homes and the number of people using unimproved water supplies continues to decline. That is thanks to your hard work! So I would like to use this platform to congratulate you and express my genuine appreciation for the work you are doing.

I would also like to commend SIWI and the Swedish government for hosting such an excellent water event every year. I am especially grateful that this World Water Week has a special focus on Sanitation.

Ladies and gentlemen, you and I are only too familiar with the disturbing facts and figures that illustrate the consequences of having no access to sanitation. But it is worth noting that very many people are still not familiar with the statistics or even aware that there is a global sanitation crisis. It is these people, policy makers and opinion leaders, that have never suffered the lack of adequate sanitation, and if they have, it is too long ago to remember the undignified, inhumane circumstances.

These people use a fancy toilet, which is connected to an effective sewer system. And they are probably unaware that this toilet and its flushing system are critical to a healthy life. It is hard for them to imagine how unsafe – not to mention embarrassing – it is to have to relieve oneself in public, in the middle of the street or for women in rural areas having to wait for sunset to find a bush or faraway field with high risks of physical assault or rape.

In order to call attention to the sanitation crisis and create awareness and support, UNSGAB recommended that the UN declare 2008 the International Year of Sanitation. And as Chair of UNSGAB, I have spent this crucial year travelling all over the world.

The year is not over yet, but I would like to take a look at what the IYS has achieved so far. In fact, this is also an appropriate moment to decide on what needs to be done in the final months of IYS 2008 and agree the future road map for achieving the MDG target on Water and Sanitation.

First, I am pleased to report that UNSGAB has received a great deal of support and cooperation this year from world leaders and governments. We have held many interesting and inspiring dialogues and I hope there will be more to come.

We are getting a lot of positive responses to our call for action. Governments and organisations are recognising sanitation issues and are showing their commitment to dealing with them by placing the subject high on the political agenda. This is one of UNSGAB's most important objectives.

I can also report that many international, regional, national and local events and initiatives have been launched. The regional sanitation conferences for example, such as LatinoSan, AfricaSan, EaSan and SacoSan, produced unprecedented declarations that provide a strong foundation for developing the water and sanitation sector in these regions.

And there have been other results: in June there was the African Union Summit on Water and Sanitation in Sharm El Sheikh. I had the honour of addressing the plenary session, attended by 52 heads of state and government. The African member states unanimously adopted a declaration on water and sanitation that builds on the promising Durban eThikwini declaration and the first African Water Week declaration. The AU declaration shows that African leaders are giving top priority to water and sanitation. It also provides a solid basis for further developing the sector in Africa. I personally consider this result to be an enormous leap forward.

Fortunately, words are being translated into action. We are also seeing impressive results on the ground. When I visited Ethiopia earlier this year, I learned that 1.3 million latrines had been built within eighteen months in the country's Southern Nations province. A

Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, clearly identifying the roles and responsibilities of the different partners within the WASH programmes in Ethiopia.

Under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, these three ministries have formed two national coordinating structures: one for policy and strategy and the other for technical and operational issues. A National Sanitation Forum has also been established to ensure that promoting sanitation and hygiene receives the focus and support it requires.

Thanks to an effective lobbying campaign, water and sanitation was also on the agenda at the G8 Summit in Hokaido in July, where the G8 leaders agreed to reinvigorate their efforts to implement the Evian Water Action Plan. At the next Summit, in Italy, they will review the plan using a progress report prepared by a team of water experts. Since that team will be meeting during this World Water Week, I would like to take this opportunity to wish them every success.

This year the Global Sanitation Fund was launched by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council. The fund offers all types of contributors (bilateral and multilateral aid organisations, commercial companies, charitable foundations and private individuals) an efficient and cost-effective way of helping the world's poorest people address their basic sanitary needs.

And this year UNSGAB took up another, less tangible and so perhaps more difficult, challenge: the IYS 2008 has made great strides in breaking the sanitation taboo by bringing unmentionable subjects like toilets and faeces out of the shadows and into the open.

UNSGAB will continue to 'call a spade a spade' – or perhaps I should say 'a toilet a toilet'. And, ladies and gentlemen, I hope I can inspire you to do the same. Because there is still a long way to go.

The questions remain: is the IYS 2008 making enough impact on the ground? Will our activities lead to sustainable improvements? In other words, how many more people are gaining access to improved sanitation facilities? How many have already paid a visit to the toilet? How many now experience improved sanitation as a basic facility?

Six months down the line we can conclude without doubt that UNSGAB's efforts are bearing fruit. We are on the right path and support around the world is increasing. But that does not mean we have achieved all our goals. In fact, we have only just begun! UNSGAB needs to continue its work; a glance at the statistics shows just how vital its efforts are.

Earlier I mentioned the 2008 JMP report. There has been remarkable progress in Asia and Latin America in terms of access to improved sanitation. In Africa, too, the number of people gaining access is rising steadily, but the increase cannot keep pace with population growth. More people means more waste. It's that simple.

The report's worrying conclusion is that, at the current rate, the world will miss its MDG sanitation target by more than 700 million people. If we are to reach the target we now need to provide at least 173 million people per year with access to improved sanitation.

So UNSGAB will continue its activities and redouble its efforts. Fortunately people at all levels and from all corners of the earth are taking notice and offering their support.

Global organisations like UNICEF and WHO regularly involve UNSGAB in their water and sanitation projects. The fact that UNSGAB's work is to be discussed in detail at the forthcoming CSD – where the primary focus is on agriculture and biofuels – reflects its relevance in this area. The meeting will trace the links between the agriculture and water agendas, and the crucial role that UNSGAB can play in both.

The World Water Forum in Istanbul next March will also devote significant attention to our work. What is more, the leaders of the G8 will continue to support UNSGAB by facilitating efforts to improve water and sanitation governance. The regional partnerships that have sprung up recently and the cooperation between local authorities and central governments and between countries, the private sector and NGOs show that UNSGAB is not working in a vacuum.

By the end of September the United Nations will review the world's progress on the MDGs. The summit's high-level segment will comprise three round-table discussions on poverty and hunger, education and health, and environmental sustainability. The challenge in these discussions will be to emphasise water and sanitation as a cross-cutting sector and to create the right basis for further sustainable measures.

I am delighted to have been invited, as Chair of UNSGAB, to speak at the MDG Summit at the round table on education and health. I believe this shows that, even beyond our sector, people understand that clean drinking water and sanitation are basic necessities for education and health. Without access to water and sanitation we cannot improve health and education.

Ahead of that round table at the MDG Summit, I am very curious to hear the ideas and suggestions that emerge this week. These may well help trigger the dialogues aimed at enhancing collaboration between the various development sectors.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the wake of the cyclone in Myanmar, the earthquake in China and the floods in the US, 'water', 'sanitation' and 'water-borne diseases' seem to have become some of the most commonly used terms in the media. Yet too often, the only response we see is crisis management.

Unfortunately, and in contrast with issues like health and education, in disaster situations people don't make the connection with the IYS and the structural solutions the global community can offer to help prevent future disasters or at least mitigate their effects. There is a clear need for a more structured approach.

The current food crisis is the latest challenge. It is global in scale and it impacts at all levels and across many sectors. Rising food and biofuel production requires vast quantities of water, placing even higher demands on water management.

We should remember that sanitation is only one aspect of water management. Reaching MDG7, target 10, involves many more elements: IWRM, transboundary and international

cooperation, good governance and capacity building. The extensive programme here at World Water Week includes plenty of time for all these issues, so we can discuss them at length in due course.

Ladies and gentlemen, 'One world, one dream' may be the slogan of the Olympic Games, but it applies equally to us. Let us pursue our goal with the same spirit and determination as our top athletes. UNSGAB will continue to offer you its support, to inspire and motivate you. The inscription on our medal reads 'sanitation for all'. That is our end goal. Silver is no option, we are going for gold!

I wish you all a highly successful and inspiring week!

Thank you.