



A UN specialist warns that sanitation is the most off-track of all MDGs.

In statement on the occasion of the upcoming World Toilet Day (19 November), Catarina de Albuquerque, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, warns that the sanitation target set by the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is today the most off-track of all, leaving around one billion people still practicing open defecation on a daily basis, and one-third of the world's population 'without access to improved sanitation.'

"This is a euphemism to describe the undignified life of billions of people who have no place to

defecate or urinate and have to do it without conditions of safety, hygiene, privacy or dignity,” Ms. de Albuquerque said on the first UN World Toilet Day. Eighty three per cent of countries have fallen significantly behind the national targets they have set for sanitation.

“I am disappointed with the slow and insufficient progress in providing these services despite the significant political and legal commitments undertaken in the last years, including the ‘Sanitation and Water for All’ initiative - a strong political platform to gather support for increasing financing for the sanitation sector”, the expert said.

The Special Rapporteur recalled that the human right to sanitation was recognized in a landmark resolution supported by the majority of UN Member States in 2010, in order to respond urgently to this alarming situation.

“From now on,” she said, “the focus has to be on sustainable solutions for those persons who are systematically forgotten and face significant barriers in accessing sanitation – because they live with a disability, because they belong to a minority, because they are homeless, because they live in a slum, because women’s and girls’ need for privacy is not guaranteed,” Ms. de Albuquerque said.

“Twenty years after World Water Day was declared, we finally can celebrate UN World Toilet Day – an occasion to unite our global efforts with States, United Nations and relevant stakeholders to make toilets a reality for all and forever”, she noted.

The human rights expert hailed the UN General Assembly’s decision declaring 19th of November as UN World Toilet Day. “I hope this declaration galvanises national and international action to reach the billions of people who still do not benefit from this basic human right,” the Special Rapporteur said.

Recalling current discussions on a future global development agenda, the rights expert also called on Governments to achieve universal access to sanitation in the post-2015 global development agenda by giving priority to the elimination of open defecation and committing to eliminate inequalities in access progressively.

“Toilets are the symbol of dignity for billions of people who still cannot enjoy them,” said Ms. de Albuquerque. “Let’s cherish them, let’s prioritize them...let’s celebrate them!”

*Catarina de Albuquerque (Portugal) currently works as a senior legal adviser at the Office for Documentation and Comparative Law (an independent institution under the Portuguese Prosecutor General’s Office) in the area of human rights. She holds a Diplôme d’Etudes Supérieures in international relations with a specialization in international law from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva. She teaches at the University of Coimbra and American University’s Washington college of Law. Ms. de Albuquerque was appointed in September 2008. Learn more about the Special Rapporteur’s mandate and work, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/SRWaterIndex.aspx>*