

Campaigners back appeal by Africa's first female President to tackle untold sanitation crisis, as UN Summit begins

New York, September 20th, 2010 - As Heads of State from across the world gather in New York this week for the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Summit, campaigners have echoed [appeals from Africa's first female Head of State](#), President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, to finally tackle an untold global health crisis.

The role of access to basic sanitation in reducing poverty remains a dirty secret amongst world leaders, neglected as a key investment to fight poverty. This is despite its potential, when delivered alongside clean water, to prevent 2.3 million child deaths every year, according to the World Health Organisation.

As a result of sustained neglect the target to halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation is now the most off track target in Sub-Saharan Africa. On current trends it will not be met in the region until the 23rd Century.

In an opinion piece for the International Herald Tribune on the eve of the summit, President Johnson Sirleaf described access to sanitation as “*the orphaned MDG*”, and “*one of the greatest untold development challenges facing the international community*”.

In response, Steve Cockburn, International Campaign Coordinator for End Water Poverty, a coalition of over 180 civil society organisations, said: “*If leaders the world over could finally act in the way demanded by Africa's first female President, we could make great strides in ending the scourge of poverty and ill-health. Access to basic sanitation must no longer be a dirty secret killing millions of children every year, and locking communities in poverty.*”

Over the next few days world leaders will discuss how to meet the range of anti-poverty targets that are due to be delivered in 2015, including those for increasing access to safe sanitation and water. The latest draft of the summit's outcome document, to be released on Wednesday, recognises the particularly slow progress in ensuring access to sanitation, but currently provides no clear or measurable actions to accelerate it.

Steve Cockburn added *“This Summit provides an opportunity for leaders to stand up and take action for the communities they have all promised to help. Speeches and declaration won’t save lives, but safe toilets, clean water, food and affordable healthcare will. If promises are kept, the lives of billions of people would be transformed.”*

Wednesday will also see the launch of the UN Secretary General’s Global Strategy on Women and Children, an attempt to galvanise action to end the deaths of 8 million children and 350,000 mothers every year. End Water Poverty is calling for this strategy to be fully implemented and funded, and to ensure it promotes a truly joined up approach to improving health, including through access to sanitation and clean water.

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Additional Notes:

- 2.6 billion people currently have no access to safe sanitation, and 884 million people have no access to clean water.
- Lack of access to sanitation and water is responsible for over 10% of the global disease burden, and diarrhoea— preventable with access to clean water and sanitation - is the biggest killer of children under 5 in Africa.

- 443 million school days are lost every year due to unclean water and unsafe sanitation, as girls have to work to fetch water, or are too sick to attend school.
- UN Development Programme estimates that every \$1 invested in providing sanitation and water delivers a \$9 economic return due to increased productivity and reduced healthcare costs.