Check against delivery

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

CLOSING REMARKS AT GENERAL ASSEMBLY THEMATIC DEBATE ON WATER, SANITATION AND SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IN THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

New York, 19 February 2014
Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this important thematic debate on water, sanitation and sustainable energy.

Most of us take water, sanitation and energy for granted. But these basic services are still out of reach for billions.

As many of you know, I am, on behalf of the Secretary-General, leading a Call to Action on Sanitation.

We must bring decent sanitation facilities to the staggering number of people, 2.5 billion, who lack this basic requirement for a life in dignity.

By substantially achieving this we accelerate progress towards one of the most lagging of the MDG targets, sanitation. This we can do if we work together -- families, communities, regions, countries, the private sector, development banks, civil society and the United Nations.
A top priority must be to end open defecation. Today one billion still practice open defecation. Our goal is to end this practice by the year 2025.

The countries where open defecation is practiced are also those with the highest numbers of under-five child deaths, and with highest levels of under-nutrition and poverty.

Just a few weeks ago I was in Ethiopia for the African Union Summit.

I visited a rural school where I talked with the children about simple hygiene. We also talked about toilets.

A 13-year-old girl, Hayat Hachallu, told me about their old toilets. They were dark, the doors didn’t close properly and the odour was terrible.

Then she proudly showed me their new facility, with separate and well-maintained toilets for boys and girls.

"It is very important to have a private place," she said. "A place where we feel safe and have the privacy we need."
In Ethiopia, progress in reducing open defecation is taking poor communities to a new level of health and well-being.

I have also, during my earlier work, seen how people who have moved away from open defecation have gained dignity and self-esteem. They are proud of their toilets and are healthier and more productive than before.

I have also seen the importance of access to clean water in homes and schools around the world.

When I was President of the General Assembly, I remember holding up a glass of clean tap water at a plenary meeting. This is a luxury for almost a billion people I said. And the lack of safe drinking water and decent sanitation facilities is the reason why thousands of children under the age of 5 die every day in the world.

That day, I felt I got everyone’s attention.

Meeting the basic right for all to safe water and sanitation means that we also have to take a hard look at how we manage and use our water resources. We are faced with competing demands from agriculture, industry, urban water supply and energy production.
The sustainable and equitable use of water resources requires innovative thinking, from the community level right up to transboundary agreements. We must not let water become a source of conflict.

Instead we should see it as a driving force for co-operation and shared responsibility.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to energy.

The Secretary-General’s Sustainable Energy for All initiative aims to achieve three interlinked objectives by 2030 – (1) universal access to modern energy services; (2) doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency and (3) doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

As Member States agreed in the Rio+20 outcome document: “we are all determined to act to make sustainable energy for all a reality.”
This year marks the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, as declared by the General Assembly.

The Decade is a unique opportunity for partnerships, commitments and action.

As the Secretary General has stated, sustainable energy for all is the golden thread that connects the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

I am glad this debate will not end after this meeting.

The energy and water nexus will also be the topic of this year's World Water Week and World Water Day on 22 March.

These fundamental basic services -- water, sanitation and energy -- are essential to reducing poverty and improving people's dignity, well-being and opportunity for a better life. Investment in these sectors is not just the right thing to do to empower millions of people. From a perspective of enlightened self-interest, we also see that it is essential to the economic, social and environmental development of communities and nations as a whole.
We have a major opportunity for action now as you define the post 2015 development agenda.

We owe the people of the world the best possible development framework.

Thank you for this productive debate on an important topic for the UN, and for the people of the world we here to serve.

***