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Right to water and sanitation vital for achieving anti-poverty goals – UN officials



Fetching water in the Borena zone in Ethiopia's Oromiya region

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Top United Nations officials today stressed the need to realize the human right to water and sanitation, stating that it is critical not only to a life of dignity but also to achieving progress in the areas such as poverty reduction, boosting child health and combating diseases.

In July 2010, the General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring that safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights.

Worldwide almost 900 million people do not have access to clean water and more than 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation. Studies also indicate about 1.5 million children under the age of five die each year and 443 million school days are lost because of water- and sanitation-related diseases.

“For millions of people, access to safe water and sanitation is an urgent need for development,” Assembly President Joseph Deiss said as he opened a plenary meeting on the subject.

The Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), a series of targets for reducing social and economic ills, all by 2015, includes the goals of halving the proportion of people who cannot reach or afford safe drinking water and halving the number who do not have basic sanitation.

Mr. Deiss said that achieving the water and sanitation targets is “fundamental” to achieving the other goals such as reducing poverty, boosting education and child health, and fighting HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

“The human right to water and sanitation is critical to ensure that everyone has a life of dignity and freedom,” he added.

Echoing the President’s comments, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon [stressed](#) that the task at hand is to translate the commitment to provide access to clean water and adequate sanitation into action.

“Let us be clear,” he stated, “a right to water and sanitation does not mean that water should be free. Rather, it means that water and sanitation services should be affordable and available for all... and that States must do everything in their power to make this happen.”

Noting that many governments have already included the rights to water and sanitation in their constitutions and domestic legislation, he said those that have yet to do so should follow suit without delay.

“We must reach all those who are denied the water and sanitation services that are necessary for their dignity and well-being,” said Mr. Ban.

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[General Assembly declares access to clean water and sanitation is a human right](#)

