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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Statement on the Right to Sanitation, 2010

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## Economic and Social Council

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### Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

#### Forty-fifth session

Geneva, 1-19 November 2010

### Statement on the Right to Sanitation<sup>1</sup>

1. Lack of access to sanitation affects human dignity and undermines the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. Until recently, sanitation was a largely neglected topic; it has gradually begun to receive more attention.
2. At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, a target on sanitation was added to the Millennium Development Goals, emphasizing that reducing the number of people without access to sanitation is as fundamentally important as the other MDG targets. In order to raise awareness of and accelerate progress towards this target, the General Assembly declared 2008, International Year of Sanitation. The Human Rights Council, in turn, by resolution A/HRC/RES/15/9 of 06 October 2010, reaffirmed the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation that was recognized by the General Assembly on 28 July 2010.
3. However, despite these positive developments, the world is not making sufficient progress. Sanitation is one of the most off-track targets of the Millennium Development Goals, and recent estimates have shown that between 2006 and 2008, an additional 100 million people were left without access to improved sanitation. Recognizing this situation, the outcome document of the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly held in September 2010 on the theme "Keeping the promise - United to achieve the Millennium Development Goals," called on Governments to redouble efforts to close the sanitation gap.
4. Indeed, 2.6 billion people do not have access to improved sanitation, and over one billion people still have no option but to practice open defecation. In developing countries, as much as 80 per cent of wastewater is untreated and goes directly into lakes, rivers and oceans (World Water Development Report, 2009, page 141). Diarrhoea, a direct consequence of this, is the second main cause of death of children under the age of five. Girls and boys do not attend school because they could contract diseases caused by inadequate sanitation.
5. Moreover, girls in many parts of the world do not go to school for lack of toilets, or lack of separate toilets for them. People living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by lack of access to sanitation. Recent research estimates that for every dollar invested in

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on 19 November 2010 during its forty-fifth session.

sanitation, there is about a nine-dollar long-term benefit in costs averted and productivity gained.

6. Fully aware of the relevance of sanitation for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living, the Committee has regularly raised the issue of sanitation in its dialogue with States Parties and made specific reference thereto in several of its General Comments.

7. Since sanitation is fundamental for human survival and to enabling humans to live a life in dignity, the Committee reaffirms that the right to sanitation is an essential component of the right to an adequate standard of living, enshrined in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to sanitation is also integrally related, among other Covenant rights, to the right to health, as set forth in article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2 (a), (b) and (c), to the right to housing (article 11), as well as the right to water, which the Committee recognized in its General Comment No. 15 (2002). It is significant, however, that sanitation has distinct features which warrant separate treatment from water, in some respects. Although much of the world relies on waterborne sanitation, increasing sanitation solutions which do not use water are being promoted and encouraged.

8. In line with the definition of sanitation proposed by the Independent Expert on water and sanitation as “a system for the collection, transport, treatment and disposal or re-use of human excreta and associated hygiene”, States must ensure that everyone, without discrimination, has physical and affordable access to sanitation “in all spheres of life, which is safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable, provides privacy and ensures dignity”. The Committee is of the view that the right to sanitation requires full recognition by States parties in compliance with the human rights principles related to non-discrimination, gender equality, participation and accountability.

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