



THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION

In the course of 2010, the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation. It is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living as stipulated in Art. 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international human rights treaties. Hence, it is part of international human rights law. A number of criteria can be used to specify the content of the right.

AVAILABILITY: The human right to water is limited to personal and domestic uses and foresees a supply for each person that must be sufficient for these purposes. Likewise, a sufficient number of sanitation facilities has to be available.

QUALITY: Water has to be safe for consumption and other uses, so that it is no threat to human health. Sanitation facilities must be hygienically and technically safe to use. To ensure hygiene, access to water for cleansing and hand washing after use is essential.

ACCEPTABILITY: Sanitation facilities, in particular, have to be culturally acceptable. This will often require gender-specific facilities, constructed in a way that ensures privacy and dignity.

ACCESSIBILITY: Water and sanitation services must be accessible to everyone in the household or its vicinity on a continuous basis. Physical security must not be threatened when accessing facilities.

AFFORDABILITY: Access to sanitation and water must not compromise the ability to pay for other essential necessities guaranteed by human rights such as food, housing and health care.

INDEPENDENT EXPERT ON THE ISSUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS RELATED TO ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque was appointed as the first Independent Expert and took up her functions in November 2008. She is called upon to:

- (A) identify, promote and exchange views on best practices related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and to prepare a compendium of best practices;
- (B) clarify the content of human rights obligations in relation to access to safe drinking water and sanitation;
- (C) make recommendations that could help the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular of Goal 7.

In addition to preparing reports on those subjects, the Independent Expert also undertakes country missions to collect information and provide advice.

For more information on the mandate of the Independent Expert, please visit:

www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/water/ieexpert

You can contact the Independent Expert at:

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

B2design.pt [José Brandão | Joana M. Remédio]
Printed in Portugal by Textype.pt - 2010 - 2nd edition



UNICEF NYHQ2000-0631 LeMoyne

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