

Barbara Frost, CE WaterAid

NY Partnership Meeting – 24 September 2008

Thank you chair, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great privilege to be invited to speak. WaterAid is an NGO that works in some of the poorest countries of Africa and Asia where many of the MDGs are unlikely to be met. We are also a founding member of the civil society coalition of over 100 organisations in 35 countries called End Water Poverty.

The very poor people we work with in villages and in towns are clear - safe water is always one of their top priorities and yet as we have heard nearly a billion people still do not have safe water and one in four of the worlds population still has no safe or hygienic place to defecate. This cannot be right in 2008.

Eight years ago the world leaders made a historic and bold compact here at the UN – to halve the numbers in poverty by 2015. We applaud that resolve and encourage further bold leadership in helping those countries most off track in terms of the MDGs and in remembering the poorest and most marginalized that the MDGs will not reach.

As those of us in this room know the impact of safe water and improved hygiene can prevent or enable progress across all of the MDGs and we most sincerely hope that the centrality of these most basic of services will be recognized tomorrow.

Safe water close to their homes allows women to work and to send their children to school – rather than being burdened with carrying water and caring for sick and dying children. Girls drop out of school because they are fetching water or due to lack of separate toilet facilities.

The numbers of children dying as we speak due to infected water and poor hygiene, dwarfs the combined numbers dying from AIDS, malaria and TB.

The historical evidence for investment in sanitation is compelling and it appears that no single development intervention can bring greater returns. WHO states for every \$1 invested there is a \$9 return.

Yet as we have heard that sanitation remains the most neglected sector and the MDG target is massively off-track in Africa.

African Ministers have identified this need and signed up to investing 0.5% of GDP and yet internationally the share of aid finance going to water and sanitation is contracting.

It is true that there are already too many meetings on water and sanitation but there is a need for determined leadership to drive action, to target the most off-track countries and to make a difference. We are calling for:

1. One global meeting annually to ensure that the resources – financial, technical and human – are directed to where they are most needed.
2. One report to inform this meeting and to focus all on what needs to be done in terms of institution building, improved coordination and financial investment.
3. And to cement this compact between the developed and developing world, we must ensure that no credible country plan, consistent with the MDGs, fails for lack of finance.

This is not beyond reach. It is no more than what has been established in the Health, Education and HIV/AIDS sectors.

We call on those who attend the second roundtable tomorrow to use your power and determined leadership to ensure that sanitation and water are given the same level of attention as health and education.

When the Secretary General delivers his closing remarks, sanitation and water need to be there alongside health and education or these MDG goals will flounder.

It would be a great day tomorrow for the worlds poorest if the leaders, from the developed and developing world, stood shoulder to shoulder tomorrow to tackle the global sanitation and water crisis and started its reversal with a Global Framework for Action.

Let us commit ourselves to focused, coordinated and urgent action!!