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Thematic Debate - General Assembly  
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Good afternoon. I am truly honoured to be invited to speak on this panel and most grateful to:

The President of the UN General Assembly, His Excellency, Dr. Treki for taking this important initiative;

The Government of Tajikistan for drawing international attention to water;

**Slide 1**

WaterAid is an international NGO that works in some of the world's poorest countries of Africa, Asia and the Pacific - with some of the poorest and most marginalised communities where many of the Millennium Development Goals, MDGs are unlikely to be met.

When poor people are asked about their priorities, water is invariably number one. Women know that it is dirty water that makes their children sick and that if safe water was closer to their homes they could be able to earn a living rather than spending hours each day collecting water.

When disasters strike, a lack of drinking water and sanitation can become especially acute. In Haiti safe drinking water was critical in the first hours and days of the relief work.

## **Slide 2**

From the perspective of the people we work with, who live without drinking water in unhygienic situations with nowhere to wash and defecate, there is a world 'crisis' now. We all know that climate change is likely to make this crisis worse and have the greatest impact on some of the world's poorest countries bringing further hardship to people already dealing with lack of the absolute basics of life – the right to safe water to drink and a decent place to go to the toilet.

## **Slide 3**

It cannot be right that in 2010 2.6 billion people do not have anywhere safe to defecate and thus risk ill health - children an untimely death and women have to deal with the lack of privacy and indignity. That is 40% of the world's population lacking this most basic right. Imagine what it is like being a woman and waiting until after dark to find a place in the open to relieve yourself.

However with the political will and commitment and the right investment we know change can happen.

In South Korea child mortality halved between 1960 and 1970 partly as a result of investment in sanitation, - a shining example of what can be done. The number of medical staff hardly changed over that decade.

In South Africa the government is committed to the right of families to have safe water and has made huge strides forward to ensure that there is a basic minimum quantity available for all.

Japan has also shown admirable leadership through their investment in water and sanitation and their support of the International Year of Sanitation 2008 and the recent follow up “Sustainable Sanitation – the Five Year Drive to 2015”.

#### Slide 4

Despite considerable political commitment the people we work with in countries such as Bangladesh or Mali struggle with a falling water table, saline and arsenic contamination, increasing numbers of floods, cyclones, droughts and erratic rainfall.

#### Slide 5

This poses serious health hazards and livelihood constraints. With increasing floods pit latrines overflow and pollute the wells and it is always women and children who suffer the most.

## Slide 6

However we have seen the amazing fortitude shown by communities when they decide through self help to take action – they take control to manage the standpipe in their area or the well which they will maintain or to ensuring improved health and hygiene of their families through the use of pit latrines and improved hygiene practices.

## Slide 7

We meet on World Water Day. Today in 70 countries around the world the End Water Poverty coalition of which WaterAid is a founding member is taking part in the ‘Worlds Longest Toilet Queue’. People will stand in line to highlight the appalling neglect of the sanitation sector and to inspire those with the power to commit to change.

We will urge and encourage the Finance, Water and Development Ministers gathering in Washington DC on 23<sup>rd</sup> April to take global action on these most basic of rights of the world’s citizens – access to a safe toilet and clean water.

We have seen global compacts work before – we witnessed the success of the Education For All initiative which set out to end user fees in primary education. Ending water poverty is also possible.

We agree with UN Water that Climate Change adaptation is mainly about water. Furthermore migration, urbanisation, changing levels of consumption and pollution compound this and pose significant threats to future water resources. Water is such a precious commodity, as our African partners say, 'water is life'.

## Slide 8

However as we know this is not a crisis of scarcity. It is about equitable distribution as this Google image of a slum area sitting next to a well watered golf club demonstrates.

## Slide 9

One in eight people still live without safe water today

While the crisis in domestic water is holding back development it is the sanitation MDG that is one of the most lagging sectors. If current trends continue, the sanitation target will be missed by 1 billion people.

## Slide 10

4000 children continue to die every day from diseases caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation. Diarrhoea is the second biggest killer of children under five in the developing world and kills more children than AIDS, TB and malaria combined.

Without improved sanitation children will not get to school - they will get sick or they will die and hospitals will continue to be treating people with water borne diseases that could so easily be prevented.

This is a daily disaster that can be solved. Solved through investment and good governance – through the UN, governments, the private sector and NGOs like WaterAid working together. We have seen the dramatic change to people's lives that safe water makes.

Yet despite this only 32% of the aid allocated for water and sanitation goes to the low income countries where the need is greatest.

Slide 11 Tom's graph

Investment in sanitation and water will also enable the other MDGs to be met. Girls will stay at school after puberty if there are decent toilets and women and girls will be healthy, freed from the burden of water carrying, indignity and disease.

This is a critical year for international leaders, halfway through the International Decade for Water, 2 years after the International Year of Sanitation and approaching the 10 year milestone towards the MDG targets.

Targets have been set and commitments made.

Drinking water supplies and sanitation are critical to ensuring ALL the MDGs are met and climate change and increasing natural disasters highlight their importance. At the current rate the MDG for sanitation will not be met in Sub Saharan Africa until 2206, almost two hundred years too late.

We look to governments and the UN to galvanise world leadership and bring to an end this crisis.

The High Level Ministerial meeting at the World Bank in April focussing on *Sanitation and Water for All: a Global Framework for Action* is such a positive step. This will bring together the UN, ministers from North and South to take concerted action and to demonstrate their commitment. We call on everyone here to do whatever is possible to make this meeting a success and to reverse decades of political and financial neglect.

To better target investment to low income countries and those living in poverty and to coordinate efforts and to take accountability for the water and sanitation crisis.

We also urge world leaders meeting to review the Millennium Development Goals at the summit in September that they commit to investing more in sanitation as well as water.

Investment in sanitation brings economic and social return (\$1 invested brings a \$9 return according to WHO). Failure to invest will lead to the failure of other MDGs.

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There is an opportunity to change the lives of the poor before climate change exacerbates their suffering. We know this is possible – it just needs leadership and political will.

Barbara Frost  
CE, WaterAid, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010