



"Governments do not prioritize hygiene in their policy and budgeting, in the school curriculum, in promotion activities," the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, emphasized on Global Handwashing Day.

"All too often, when we consider water and sanitation, the importance of good hygiene, including handwashing, is forgotten," Ms. de Albuquerque said. "However, in times of global health threats, the life-saving potential of handwashing must be explored. During the 2009 A virus flu pandemic, global leaders were very conscious of handwashing's vital importance."

As the 2015 deadline for the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals approaches, the independent human rights expert urged world leaders "not to lose sight of the centrality of good hygiene for the full realization of the human rights to water, sanitation, health, as well as for dignity and development."

Good hygiene is essential to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases, one of the main causes of infant mortality. Encouraging good handwashing habits among children can act as a 'do-it-yourself' vaccine against diarrhoeal disease, for a lifetime's protection, preventing more deaths and illness than any other medical intervention.

"Women's needs should be also considered and incorporated in the delivery of water and sanitation services if we want to attain gender equality," Ms. de Albuquerque stressed, making clear that, with adequate menstrual hygiene management, adolescent girls do miss school days during their menstruation.

"I call on all to prioritize handwashing and hygiene in the post-2015 development framework," the rights expert appealed as world governments start to set priorities and to make trade-offs in the context of discussions in respect of the next generation of global development goals.

"Water and sanitation services have little value if not accompanied by the necessary resources which can be committed to promoting hygiene, to ensuring that sufficient water and the necessary soap is available for handwashing at the appropriate times – particularly before eating and preparing food and after using the toilet," the UN Special Rapporteur said. "It all begins with soap and water."

Catarina de Albuquerque is the first UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. She was appointed by the Human Rights Council in 2008. Ms. de Albuquerque is a Professor at the Law Faculties of the Universities of Braga and Coimbra and the American University's Washington College of Law and a Senior Legal Adviser at the Office for Documentation and Comparative Law, an independent institution under the Prosecutor General's Office. Learn more, log on to: www.ohchr.org/srwaterandsanitation

Additional link:

- [International Decade for Action: 'Water for Life 2005 - 2015'](#)
- [Global Handwashing Day website](#)