



"Eliminating inequalities can start in the most unlikely of places: a toilet," said the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, on World Toilet Day (19 November). "Access to sanitation facilities around the world, more than any other service, provides a window into the vast difference between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.'"

"Every day, 7,500 people die due to a lack of sanitation, 5,000 of whom are less than 5 years old. Every year, 272 million schooldays are missed due to water-borne or sanitation-related diseases," Ms. de Albuquerque recalled, noting that more than one out of three people do not have access to improved sanitation facilities, according to UN Millennium Development Goals figures.

"Access to sanitation currently ranks as the most-off track of the Millennium Goals, and one that will obviously not be met by 2015," she stressed, noting that enormous challenges remain despite the attention paid in recent years to accelerating the pace of change for such appalling reality.

The human rights expert drew special attention to the fact that one of the most critical challenges is the high number of people still practicing open defecation on a daily basis – over 1 billion, producing enough faeces to fill a football stadium every day.

"Try to imagine yourself without toilets – no toilet in your workplace and no toilet at home. Imagine you had to relieve yourself in the streets of your city or town. Imagine yourself trying to find every single day a quiet, secluded spot. Imagine the insecurity and indignity of the situation – especially if you are a woman. And suppose you could smell excrement, because your city had no money to build and maintain a proper sewer system," de Albuquerque asked. "This is the situation billions of people face today – especially those who are most marginalized."

Safe, sustainable and affordable access to a toilet is essential for the well-being and rights of every human being. "This is not only about ensuring the right to sanitation, but is also critical for the enjoyment of numerous other rights, such as the right to health, the right to education, the right to work and the right to lead a life in dignity," the UN Special Rapporteur highlighted.

"Those who do not have access to adequate sanitation are overwhelmingly people living in poverty, and marginalised and excluded individuals and groups," she said, "but the UN Millennium Development Goals have not provided a solution to resolve this gap in equality of access."

In her view, "lack of sanitation will keep these same people sick, away from school and work, victims of violence when trying to find a place to hide to 'do their business' and not able to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion in which they are trapped."

In her latest report* to the UN General Assembly, Ms. de Albuquerque asks for a post-2015 development agenda that once and for all aims at eliminating discrimination and inequalities in access to water and sanitation; an agenda that strives to ensure access to adequate sanitation for all, prioritising available resources and devising new policies to address the needs of those individuals and groups who are currently excluded.

On World Toilet Day, the UN Special Rapporteur's message is simple: "Giving these people sanitation and hygiene, will be a fundamental step to allow them to aspire to a better life. It is about a toilet, of all places."

(*) Check Ms. de Albuquerque report to the UN General Assembly (A/67/270). Short summaries in English, Spanish and French are also [available here](#) .

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

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