



In a bid to make sanitation for all a global development priority, the United Nations General Assembly has designated 19 November as World Toilet Day, urging changes in both behaviour and policy on issues ranging from enhancing water management to ending open-air defecation.

Adopting a new resolution, the Assembly urged UN Member States and relevant stakeholders to encourage behavioural change and the implementation of policies to increase access to sanitation among the poor, along with a call to end the practice of open-air defecation, which it deemed “extremely harmful” to public health.

“This new annual observance will go a long way toward raising awareness about the need for all human beings to have access to sanitation,” said UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson in a [statement](#) issued immediately following the Assembly’s action.

The resolution also recognizes the role that civil society and non-governmental organizations play in raising awareness of this issue. It also calls on countries to approach sanitation in a much broader context that includes hygiene promotion, the provision of basic sanitation services, and sewerage and wastewater treatment and reuse in the context of integrated water

management.

Of the world's seven billion people, six billion have mobile phones. However, only 4.5 billion have access to toilets or latrines – meaning that 2.5 billion people, mostly in rural areas, do not have proper sanitation. In addition, 1.1 billion people still defecate in the open.

The countries where open defecation is most widely practiced are the same countries with the highest numbers of under-five child deaths, high levels of under-nutrition and poverty, and large wealth disparities.

“Despite progress toward the Millennium Development Goals, one in three people do not have a basic toilet,” Mr. Eliasson said. “Almost 2,000 children die every day from preventable diarrhoeal diseases. Poor sanitation and water supply result in economic losses estimated at \$260 billion annually in developing countries.”

He added that sanitation is also a question of basic dignity, and underlined that women should not risk being victims of rape and abuse because of lack of access to a toilet that offers privacy.

“It is also unacceptable that many girls are pushed out of school for lack of basic sanitation facilities,” he said. “I urge every country to accelerate progress towards a world in which everyone enjoys this most basic of rights.”

World Toilet Day has previously been marked by international and civil society organizations all over the world. However, it was not formally recognized as an official UN day until today.

Source: [UN News](#)

2.5 billion people without toilets

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