

Statement from the Women and Gender Coalition at the 5th World Water Forum Ministerial Conference Closing

Istanbul, 22nd March 2009

This week the ministers have prepared a ministerial declaration, which unfortunately, goes back in time and seems to forget earlier commitments made by governments to insure the right to water and sanitation.

As those of you who know CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, - as all of you do of course – article 46 assures the right to water for rural women.

It is said that the ministers present still debate whether the right to water and sanitation is a human right, instead of moving forward on how to implement and assure this human right, in particular for the poor and vulnerable, in particular women and children.

Too often, women because of lack of land rights cannot claim their water rights. Too often, large international companies can empty the aquifers for their soft-drink production – to name an example – and leave small farmers without a drop for survival.

It is the role of Governments to protect their people, and the most vulnerable, particularly in areas prone to conflicts.

Many countries have already embedded the human right to water and sanitation in their constitutions.

What is essential is to learn from good practices, how do countries achieve access for all, at affordable cost, and have mechanisms to support vulnerable groups which are unable to pay for the service provision of safe water and sanitation, for example, providing a basic quantity of water for free for each person.

Implementing the human right to water has been less well implemented, sanitation often does not have sufficient policy priority, and gender and women's organisations are particularly worried about the lack of access to safe sanitation for school children in many, if not most, countries of this world. Girls need access to school toilets, which are separate from boys, where doors close, where menstrual hygiene is supported, and where girls are not harassed.

We call on all governments to commit to providing the right for each child to safe school sanitation taking girls special needs into account.

To assure that these commitments are followed, we also need to introduce indicators, gender specific, to monitor if we are moving towards reaching this goal, we therefore recommend governments to take note of the 6 gender specific indicators prepared by the women's organisations, available from the UN Gender and Water Taskforce.

Thank you for listening and we do hope that you will take the urgent action needed.

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