

# Glossary on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation

## A

### **Agenda 21**

The plan of action to achieve sustainable development that was adopted by world leaders at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992.

## C

### **Convention**

In the legal sense, a convention is a set of agreed, stipulated, generally accepted standards, and norms, taking the form of a treaty in international law.

### **Covenant/International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**

A treaty that 160 countries have ratified as of April 2011, making it legally binding upon them in international law. The Covenant is the primary basis for the human right to water and sanitation and other economic, social and cultural rights.

### **Customary international law**

International norms derived from a general and consistent practice of States and followed by them out of a sense of legal obligation (*opinio juris*), rather than from formal expression in a treaty or legal text. Such norms are legally binding on all States, with the exception of those States that are “persistent objectors.”

## D

### **Domestic uses of water**

Domestic uses normally include drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation, personal and household hygiene.

## G

### **General Comment No. 15**

UN General Comment No. 15 on the Right to Water adopted in 2002 by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a committee of experts elected by those States that have ratified the ICESCR. Although General Comment No. 15 is not legally binding, it is an authoritative interpretation of the provisions of the ICESCR.

## I

### **Improved drinking-water sources**

Piped household water connection located inside the user's dwelling, plot or yard. Public taps or standpipes, tube wells or boreholes, protected dug wells, protected springs or rainwater collection.

### **Improved sanitation**

An improved sanitation facility is one that hygienically separates human excreta from human contact and can consist of one of the following facilities:

Flush/pour.flush.to piped sewer system, septic tank, pit latrine; Ventilated improved pit latrine; Pit latrine with slab; Composting toilet.

### **Inter alia**

Latin term for "among other things." Legal drafters often use this term to precede a list of examples or samples covered by a more general descriptive statement.

## M

### **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals are eight goals that all 191 UN member states have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000 commits world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. The MDGs are derived from this Declaration, and all have specific targets and indicators.

## O

### **Open defecation**

When human faeces are disposed of in fields, forests, bushes, open bodies of water, beaches or other open spaces or disposed of with solid waste.

## P

### **Pit latrine**

Latrine with a pit for accumulation and decomposition of excrete and from which liquid infiltrates into the surrounding soil.

## S

### **Sanitation**

Sanitation is access to, and use of, excreta and wastewater facilities and services that ensure privacy and dignity, ensuring a clean and healthy living environment for all. "Facilities and Services" should include the 'collection, transport, treatment

and disposal of human excreta, domestic wastewater and solid waste and associated hygiene promotion' to the extent demanded by the particular environment conditions.

### **Shared sanitation facilities**

Sanitation facilities of an otherwise acceptable type shared between two or more households.

## **U**

### **Unimproved drinking-water sources**

Unprotected dug well, unprotected spring, cart with small tank/drum, surface water (river, dam, lake, pond, stream, canal, irrigation channels), and bottled water.

### **Unimproved sanitation facilities**

Facilities which do not ensure hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact. Unimproved facilities include pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines and bucket latrines.

## **V**

### **Vulnerable and marginalised groups**

Vulnerable groups are those, such as children, who require special attention due to their physical conditions. Marginalised groups are those, such as those living in informal settlements, which require special attention due to their traditional and/or current exclusion from political power and resources.

## **W**

### **Water point**

This is a generic term used to describe any point of access to water for domestic uses. This includes a household connection, stand-pipe, well, borehole, spring, rainwater harvesting unit, water kiosk or other point of transaction with a water vendor. The term is used to avoid any bias or confusion regarding certain types of access to water.

### **WHO Guidelines for drinking-water quality**

These guidelines provide guidance on good practices for ensuring that drinking water is adequate for human health.

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