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Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation

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An Open Letter from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation to all the United Nations Member States on the final draft of the Post-2015 Development Goals

As Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, I wish to congratulate the United Nations Member States on their commitments to “achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all” and to “achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations” by 2030 as well as other related targets under the proposed Goal 6 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am encouraged by their vision envisaging “A world where access to safe and affordable drinking water is a basic and universal human right...where there is adequate and accessible sanitation”. I wish to recall the Member States, however, that access to safe, affordable, accessible, available and acceptable water and sanitation is a human right already recognized by the General Assembly itself and the Human Rights Council, but is not a reality for millions of people. Therefore, I would like to reiterate that what the world leaders need to aim for is **a world where the human right to water and sanitation is realized for all, and where hygiene is available to all.**

In order to achieve the human rights to water and sanitation for everyone, we must know **who the un- and under-served people are and why they are disadvantaged or marginalized.** In this connection, I agree to the Member States’ commitment on data collection, monitoring and accountability. Addressing income inequality will not be sufficient to achieve universal goals including the one on water and sanitation. We must monitor who have and have not reached each goal using quality data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other prohibited grounds of discrimination under international human rights law. It will be also essential that people freely and actively participate in and contribute to monitoring including the data collection, analysis and dissemination, as well as in overall implementation arrangements at the national and local levels.

The disadvantaged groups need to be definitively prioritized over the relatively advanced groups in the implementation agenda, in order to reach the same goal by 2030 and to fasten the realization of other related sustainable development goals. If only 30 percent of people living in informal settlements have access to adequate sanitation while 80 percent of other urban population enjoy access, then we need to start with people living in informal settlements. It is the matter of priority for the Member States to identify the most disadvantaged in access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene and make focused efforts, including the targeted allocation of budgets, to ensure their access.

I encourage all the Member States to fulfil their still ambiguous but nevertheless feasible commitments regarding water, sanitation and hygiene on the basis of the existing

human rights framework, including principles of equality and non-discrimination and participation. Only then will the Post-2015 Development Goals “work to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are enjoyed by all”, as the draft Declaration states. As Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, I wish to offer my support to such efforts by the Member States and other stakeholders.

Sincerely yours,



Léo Heller

Special Rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation

