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

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Human rights are key to ensure an ambitious post-2015 development framework

An Open Letter from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation to all United Nations Member States

As Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, I wish to express my satisfaction at the significant advancements in the protection and promotion of the human rights to water and sanitation reflected in the latest working document (“Zero Draft”) of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals of 2 June 2014.

I am particularly pleased to see the inclusion of “universal access to safe and affordable sanitation and hygiene at home, schools, health centres and refugee camps” under proposed goal 6. In this context, I would like to call for an explicit target aimed at eliminating open defecation. People who have no choice but to practise open defecation should be the first priority while aiming at universal access to safe and affordable sanitation and hygiene.

I also welcome the clear commitment to “reduce inequality within and among countries” under the newly included goal 10. A comprehensive approach to reducing inequalities as reflected in the working document is essential, and special efforts must be devoted and specific attention must be paid to the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals. While I fully support a commitment such as “reduc[ing] inequalities of opportunity and outcome among social groups, including economic, social, and environmental inequalities”, this pledge must be clearly defined, be time bound and ambitious, so that respective targets and indicators are meaningful and progress is easily monitored. Furthermore, any promise to reduce inequalities will have to be clearly linked to other goals and targets.

Finally, I wish to recall that United Nations Member States recognized the human right to water and sanitation as derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, the importance of which is reaffirmed in the introduction of the working document. The human rights to water and sanitation guide us in ensuring access to safe, affordable, available, accessible and acceptable water and sanitation for all without discrimination, while progressively eliminating inequalities in achieving universal access. The formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals presents an unprecedented opportunity to reaffirm explicitly the human rights to water and sanitation as being indivisible from, and interrelated to all other human rights. I hence encourage United Nations Member States to maintain the positive new elements introduced in the working document and continue their efforts to further strengthen it.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Catarina de Albuquerque".

Catarina de Albuquerque
Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation

