

PERMANENT MISSION OF INDIA TO THE UN

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

18TH SESSION (12-30 Sept 2011)

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque,
(15 Sept 2011)

Statement by India

Madam President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, for her report elaborating on the process of national and local planning for the implementation of the rights to water and to sanitation, and the significance of integrating human rights throughout the planning process from assessment and diagnosis, target-setting, to monitoring and evaluation. In doing so, she has underscored the importance of a vision and political will to ensure the realization of these rights.

02. Madam President, Sanitation is one of the most pressing contemporary global development issues, posing grave health challenges, exacerbating socio-economic and gender differences and undermining the process of inclusive growth and development. Acknowledging the strong direct and indirect linkages of sanitation with socio-economic and health aspects, India had launched the 'Total Sanitation Campaign' in 1999, with the objective of attaining 100% sanitation coverage in terms of households, schools, and anganwadi toilets and also providing hygiene education to the people. It is a demand-responsive, community-oriented, low-subsidy programme in a project mode. As a result, the sanitation coverage in rural areas which was 21.9 per cent as per 2001 census, has increased to 73 per cent today. The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation has finalized, through public consultations, a 'National Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Strategy 2012-2022' to achieve sanitation related goals in a time-bound manner.

03. Supply of clean drinking water has been given priority in the Constitution of India, which confers the duty of providing clean drinking water and improving public health standards to the State. Today, 94 per cent of the rural population and 91 per cent of the people living in urban areas have access to safe drinking water. Despite the challenges of its size and diversity, India has achieved the Millennium Development Goal-7 targets related to safe drinking water much ahead of the target date. Our goal, however, is to provide every household with safe and improved drinking water by 2012.

04. Madam President, we note the Special Rapporteur's emphasis on assessment and monitoring, and appreciate her attention to work done by an important institute in India. We take positive note of her recommendation that targets set should be conscious of human rights criteria of availability, quality, acceptability, accessibility and affordability. We also support her view that the process of planning must be country-driven.

05. While elaborating on the factors for success, the Special Rapporteur has emphasized the necessity of transparency and access to information for enabling participation. We take positive note of her reference to India's Right to Information legislation which has had, as she has pointed out, "a significant impact on improving transparency by providing a tool to seek information and demand accountability from governments". The implementation of the Right to information Act has not only enhanced transparency, but also improved effective participation of citizens in public policy planning and implementation. The success of our "Bharat Nirman", or Build India programme, in relation to safe drinking water can be attributed partly to this. To further strengthen community participation in the drinking water sector, the National Rural Drinking Water Quality Monitoring & Surveillance programme was launched in February, 2006 with focused funding including provision of water-testing kits.

06. Madam President, the challenge today is not merely achieving the targets of implementing the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, but sustainability of the achieved targets. In this respect, we would request the Special Rapporteur to provide some insights on how she thinks sustainability can be achieved.

Thank you, Madam President.