

Brown bag event

No one left behind: Good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation

Opening remarks by Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE

3 July 2012 - 1.30 – 2.45pm – Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room XVI

- Speaking on behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, as well as our partner in the joint secretariat, the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization, I would like to warmly welcome you in this brown bag event on equitable access to water and sanitation.
- As already mentioned by Mr. Pellet, safe drinking water and improved sanitation shall not be taken for granted in Europe. The recent attainment of the MDG target on access to water at the global level shows that remarkable progress has been done in this area. However the global statistic hides important problems related to water quality, affordability, and inequities in access. In particular, some parts of the pan-European region (namely the Caucasus and Central Asia) have regressed instead of progressing in terms of access to water. Moreover we are still far from meeting the MDG target for sanitation, and it is unlikely that we will do so by 2015.
- The UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health provides a sound framework for the achievement of water-related MDGs. But the Protocol goes further than the MDGs and requires that Parties ultimately ensure universal access to water and sanitation, within time frames tailored to the country situation and capacity.
- Moreover the Protocol clearly states that “equitable access to water, adequate in terms of both quantity and quality, should be provided for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion” and that “special consideration should be given to the protection of people who are particularly vulnerable to water-related diseases”. Thus the Protocol requires Parties to look beyond averages, to examine in-country disparities and to ensure that the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups are not overlooked.
- For this non-discriminatory approach, as well as for the focus on transparency, public participation and accountability provisions, the Protocol is considered a powerful tool for the translation of the human right to water and sanitation into practice.
- The Rio+20 Conference has reconfirmed the commitment to the MDGs related to water and sanitation as well as the commitment to the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Remarkably, the Rio+20 final document, The Future We Want, also puts an accent on the issue of affordability of drinking water. These

commitments underline the importance and timeliness of the work under the Protocol on the equity of access to water and sanitation presented today.

- The publication *No one left behind*, launched at the World Water Forum in March 2012, provides examples of how different countries have attempted to reduce inequities in access to water and sanitation services, targeting the challenges raised by the urban – rural gap in access, the access for vulnerable and marginalized groups and the affordability of access to water and sanitation. The publication has raised a great interest among Parties, partners, NGOs and other stakeholders, confirming the significance of the issues and the vision of France when deciding to lead and finance the development of the approach focusing on equity.
- Efforts to promote equitable access to water and sanitation will not stop with this publication. Policymakers should find inspiration in the good practices presented in the publication and try similar or innovative measures to fulfil their commitments to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation. The framework of the National Policy Dialogues might be used to work at the national and local levels on this issue. In particular, potential synergy with the upcoming work on the development of a self-evaluation tool could be explored. The complementarity of the work under the Protocol and the Water Convention offers many opportunities to strengthen each other's initiatives and activities.
- The publication could not have been prepared without the financial support from the French Ministry of Health, the contributions and inspiration provided by the members of the drafting group, and the crucial partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Right and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Water and Sanitation.
- I would like to thank the French Government for the leadership and financial support of the activities on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health. We are very pleased that France continues leading these activities under the Protocol and look forward to the next steps.