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Commitments to water and sanitation must come with real commitments to human rights

An Open Letter from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to water and sanitation to States negotiating the Outcome Document of the Rio+20 Summit

As the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, I strongly call on States to recommit to the human right to water and sanitation at Rio+20.

The original zero draft of the outcome document “underline[s] the importance of the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights” (*para. 67*).

In the first and second rounds of ‘informal-informal’ negotiations on the zero draft held in New York between 19 to 23 March and 23 April to 4 May, some States suggested alternative language that does not explicitly refer to the human right to water and sanitation.

The right to water and sanitation is a human right that has been already recognized under international law, including by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council in 2010. UN Member States are in consensus in this regard. I, therefore, call on all States to maintain their support to this fundamental human right and its explicit inclusion in the Rio+20 outcome document.

It is clear that a commitment to water and sanitation without the recognition of the human right to water and sanitation is insufficient to achieve the future we all want. The recognition of the human right to water and sanitation guides us to prioritize the un- and under-served and to ensure non-discrimination.

A **sustainable development** target for water and sanitation should aim at achieving **access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all without discrimination, in sufficient quantities** to protect human health and dignity, particularly for the most marginalized.

.../...



I know that all States support a future where every single individual enjoys access to safe drinking water and sanitation. I know that all States want a future where children do not die due to unsafe drinking water. The future I am referring to is about saving lives and about restoring the lost dignity of the millions of people who have been neglected and forgotten over the past decades, people who have not enjoyed any benefits from recent progress in water and sanitation.

The decisions that States will now take at Rio+20 will impact national policy-making, national and local budget allocations and the prioritization of funds by donors. The outcome of the Rio+20 negotiation, therefore, has strong potential in helping shape the future and peoples' lives for decades to come. States must not miss this opportunity.

At Rio +20 we must again underline our commitments to the human right to water and sanitation. This right is essential for the full enjoyment of life and other human rights. Only by recommitting to the human right to water and sanitation will we achieve sustainable development that places people at the centre.

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