



**SANITATION & WATER ACTION
NETWORK CANADA**
**RESEAU D'ACTION POUR
L'ASSAINISSEMENT ET L'EAU CANADA**



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November 19, 2007

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister's Office
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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Dear Prime Minister,



We, the members of Sanitation & Water Action Network (SWAN) Canada, a newly-formed and growing coalition of Canadian non-governmental organizations, wish to bring to your attention one of the world's most lethal and least reported humanitarian crises.



Around the globe, **2.6 billion people – 42 per cent of the world's population - live without access to basic sanitation.** This means no toilets, no latrines, no separation of human waste from daily life. Without access to basic sanitation, people are forced to relieve themselves in streets, fields, and water sources, or resort to the use of “flying toilets” – plastic bags full of human waste that litter neighbourhoods and undermine quality of life for residents.



The consequences of the **global sanitation crisis** are devastating and far-reaching:



- Every year, some two million people die from diarrhoeal diseases caused by poor sanitation and dirty water; 90 per cent of these **preventable** deaths occur in children under the age of five
- At any one time, half of the world's hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from water and sanitation-related diseases, making it the single largest cause of sickness around the globe
- Healthcare costs soar, countless school and working days are lost, and communities around the world sink deeper into poverty and despair



The fight against global poverty is inextricably linked to sanitation. In 2000, Canada and other members of the international community committed to achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), one of which was to halve the number of people without access to clean water and sanitation by 2015.



While significant progress has been made towards improving access to clean water, the sanitation target is dangerously off track. At current rates of progress, **the 2015 sanitation target will be missed by more than half a billion people.** There is also compelling evidence that this lack of progress is hampering efforts in other key areas of development, such as improving girls' access to education, promoting gender equality, and reducing child mortality.



To highlight the critical role that sanitation plays in reducing poverty, the UN has designated 2008 as the “International Year of Sanitation”. **Prime Minister, we are calling on you and the Canadian government to provide international leadership in the fight against global poverty by investing in sanitation and water initiatives in the developing world.** Ending the global sanitation crisis is achievable, but increased support from countries like Canada is urgently needed.

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Why invest in sanitation?

- **Investing in sanitation makes sense.** According to the World Health Organization, the economic cost of the global sanitation crisis amounts to \$38 billion each year. In contrast, every dollar spent on improving sanitation generates an average economic benefit of \$9. Given that a recent poll in the prestigious *British Medical Journal* named sanitation as **the** most important medical advance since 1840, ahead of antibiotics, anaesthesia, and vaccines, we cannot underestimate the impact that increased sanitation investment can have on the developing world.
- **The cost is much less than what you might think.** With sustained funding from the international community, basic sanitation for the entire world could be achieved within one to two decades. In relative terms, the cost of such investment (approx. \$10 billion globally per year) is less than one per cent of annual world military spending, or about one-third of yearly spending on bottled water.
- **Canada can make a difference and lead the way.** Currently, sanitation and water-related projects represent two per cent (approx. \$70 million) of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) annual disbursements, and only a portion of that goes directly to providing clean water and sanitation to the world's poorest people. Given the crucial role of sanitation and water in sustainable development and poverty reduction, increased funding for sanitation projects in the developing world would yield significant results and lay a strong foundation for CIDA's broader poverty-fighting efforts.

Prime Minister, we, the members of SWAN Canada, would welcome the opportunity to support the Canadian government's efforts to provide basic sanitation and clean water to the world's poorest people. Sanitation for all can and should be achieved. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,



Kevin McCort
Interim CEO
CARE Canada



Anna Miller
Director of Programmes
Canadian Physicians for
Aid & Relief



Constance Wansbrough
Executive Director
Harbinger Foundation



Robert Fox
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Velma McColl
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Gary H. J. Pluim
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Tony Petrucci
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Cc: The Hon. Beverly J. Oda, Minister of International Cooperation
The Hon. Stéphane Dion, Leader of the Liberal Party
The Hon. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
The Hon. Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party