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## UN launches major push to improve global sanitation by 2015



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In a bid to improve the health and well-being of millions of people worldwide, the United Nations today launched a major push to accelerate progress towards the goal of halving, by 2015, the proportion of the population without access to basic sanitation.

Access to sanitation has been recognized by the UN as a human right, a basic service required to live a normal life. And yet, some 2.6 billion people – or half the population in the developing world – still lack access to improved sanitation.

The drive launched today, “Sustainable sanitation: The Five-Year-Drive to 2015,” was established by the General Assembly in a resolution adopted last December that called on Member States to redouble efforts to close the sanitation gap, one of the eight Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) that world leaders have pledged to achieve by 2015.

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The resolution also called for an end to open defecation, the most dangerous sanitation practice for public health and one practised by over 1.1 billion people who have no access to facilities.

“Sanitation is a sensitive issue. It is an unpopular subject. Perhaps that is why the sanitation crisis has not been met with the kind of response we need,” [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon said at the launch.

“But that must change,” he added. “It is time to put sanitation and access to proper toilets at the centre of our development discussions.”

Ending open defecation, in particular, will not be easy, [said](#) the Secretary-General, adding that it will require strong political commitment, a focused policy framework and reliable supply chains for both building and maintaining affordable latrines.

“Most important of all, we need effective public education so people understand the hazards of open defecation. We must convince people to change these unhealthy practices.”

Children under five are the most vulnerable to poor hygiene and inadequate sanitation, two of the major causes of diarrhoea. According to the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the disease kills at least 1.2 million children under five each year.

“We can reduce cases of diarrhoea in children under five by a third – and save an untold number of young lives – simply by expanding the access of communities to sanitation,” [said](#) Anthony Lake, UNICEF’s Executive Director.

He added that focusing on total hygiene does more than improve health. “It can also improve the safety of women and girls, who are often targeted when they are alone outdoors. And providing safe, private toilets may also help girls stay in school – which we know can increase their future earnings and help break the cycle of poverty.”

The Prince of Orange, Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, who is Chairperson of the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, noted that sanitation is arguably the most overlooked and less advanced MDG target.

“It is unglamorous, yet vital,” he stated. “Neglecting the need for proper toilets allows a slow moving crisis to continue.”

The main messages of the new drive launched today, he added, are that sanitation is vital for health, brings dignity, equality and safety, represents a good economic investment and sustains clean environments.

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