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Summit Agreement on New Goal to Expand Access to Sanitation

Johannesburg, 2 September—In a major step forward to promote efforts to eradicate poverty and protect the environment, countries agreed to commit themselves to a target of 2015 for reducing the numbers of people who lack access to proper sanitation.

The new commitment on sanitation comes as a companion target to the already agreed upon goal of halving the proportion of people who lack access to clean water, which is one of the Millennium Development Goals and which has been reaffirmed in Johannesburg. The new commitments agreed to in Johannesburg also call on countries to provide the resources and technical assistance needed to embark on action programmes to meet the goals.

More than one billion people presently lack access to clean drinking water, and another billion people lack access to proper sanitation. A lack of clean water and sanitation is blamed for causing more than three quarters of diseases. More than seven million children die every year—6,000 a day—due to diarrhoeal diseases including cholera and dysentery. The new commitments to tackle the water and sanitation issues are considered essential elements necessary for the promotion of sustainable development.

“It is hard to imagine how we can implement sustainable development when two billion people lack proper sanitation facilities,” according to Johannesburg Summit Secretary-General Nitin Desai. “These new commitments show that the Johannesburg Summit has moved the international community to take action on an essential element in the fight to reduce poverty, promote human dignity, and protect and improve the environment.”

“This is an historic commitment,” Desai said, “because for the first time, the world has made the issues of water and sanitation a high-level political priority. We need this political commitment, and now we need the practical measures and partnerships to ensure that the new goals are met.”

Desai cautioned, however, that the agreements on water and sanitation did not mark the end of the fight. “We have to recognize that the new targets, if met, will only bring clean water and proper sanitation to half of the people who lack these necessities. There is still the other half, and we cannot stop until everyone benefits.”

During the Summit, several donor countries, including the United States and the European Union, have pledged to commit significant resources to new initiatives that will expand access

to clean water and proper sanitation. In addition, many partnership initiatives by NGOs, international organizations and the private sector have been launched at the Summit to address these needs.

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