

## UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECLARES 2008 INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SANITATION

Adopting a recommendation made by the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB), the United Nations General Assembly on Wednesday, December 20, 2006, declared 2008 the International Year of Sanitation (IYS).

Dismayed by halting progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goal target of halving by 2015 the number of people without sustainable access to basic sanitation, UNSGAB's members began advocating for the IYS at the World Water Forum in March 2006. More recently, UNSGAB included the recommendation that the UN General Assembly declare the IYS part of its global work plan (commonly known as the Hashimoto Action Plan).

As reported by the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Water and Sanitation:

*"The absence of sanitation and hygiene from much of the discussion about water, health and development has found various explanations over the years. What is clear is that excreta and its disposal have been and continue to be, unpopular subjects from the local to international levels. Without strong champions to raise public awareness and generate concern, the sanitation crisis has not been met with anything resembling the kind of response necessary to make substantial and sustainable gains."*

UNSGAB firmly believes that the IYS is a critical mechanism for finding "strong champions" who will respond to the world's sanitation crisis. The IYS will stimulate a frank dialogue at all levels while creating a context for political leadership and government commitments to allocate greater resources to sanitation for the poor.

The IYS was recently promoted by UNSGAB's new Chair, His Royal Highness Willem-Alexander, the Prince of Orange of the Netherlands in the African Regional Dialogue with the African Development Bank and the African Minister's Council on Water, held in Tunis on 14 December. Africa lags behind on meeting the MDG sanitation target, and participants at the Dialogue agreed that the IYS will furnish both advocacy and new opportunities for on-the-ground interventions.

The General Assembly requested the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs to serve as the focal point for IYS. They will host a workshop on the IYS roadmap in early 2007.