



United Nations Independent Expert on Human rights and Extreme Poverty

Press Release

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“Bangladesh must do more to reach the poorest, especially to ensure their access to safe drinking water and sanitation,” declare UN Experts.

“Bangladesh must do more to reach the extreme poor, including regarding access to water and sanitation” concluded the Independent Experts on human rights and extreme poverty, Magdalena Sepúlveda and on human rights water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque after a week long visit to the country. They noted that the provision of basic services, especially water and sanitation, is critical to lifting people out of poverty and fulfilling human rights obligations.

“The country has made progress in poverty alleviation, but social protection policies are not reaching those who need them most. Poverty reduction strategies, especially related to social safety net programmes, are implemented in a disconcertingly fragmented manner. Bangladesh must design an integrated and comprehensive social protection strategy, and measures must be taken to target the most vulnerable effectively” said Ms. Sepúlveda. “The commitment to achieve total sanitation by 2013 and reduce the impact of arsenic contamination in the drinking water is commendable. However, I am concerned that programmes to provide the poorest with sanitation, or with arsenic filters, are not reaching the intended beneficiaries,” added Ms. de Albuquerque.

The experts placed particular emphasis on the obligation to eliminate all forms of discrimination. “In Bangladesh, discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, work, descent, and tenure status, is rampant. This has an enormous impact on these individuals' ability to lift themselves out of poverty and to claim their rights, including their rights to water and sanitation,” asserted the experts.

Both experts emphasised that it is impossible to reduce poverty and improve access to water and sanitation without also combating corruption. They insisted that “clear accountability mechanisms must be established for violations of all human rights, including socio-economic rights.”

As the world meets in Copenhagen this week, the experts called attention to the precarious situation of Bangladesh with regard to climate change. “Climate change is undoubtedly a major challenge facing the population of Bangladesh, with the poorest people suffering the most, and with severe implications for enjoyment of the rights to water and to sanitation. Although climate change is largely caused by external factors, the

Government must take urgent steps to protect the human rights of people affected. We also call on the international community to reinforce contributions to national efforts.”

“Bangladesh is facing big problems, but it has also shown the world that it has creative answers to complicated issues. We are convinced that going forward, Bangladesh will demonstrate its capacity to find innovative solutions”, they concluded.

The Experts visited Bangladesh from 3-10 December 2009. They visited Dhaka, Cox’s Bazaar, and Comilla. They will present their reports on this visit to the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2010.

** Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque has been the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation since November 2008. Ms. De Albuquerque is a Portuguese lawyer and is currently working as senior legal adviser at the Office for Documentation and Comparative Law in the area of human rights.*

*** Ms. Magdalena Sepúlveda has been the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty since May 2008. Ms. Sepúlveda is a Chilean lawyer and is currently working as Research Director at the International Council on Human Rights Policy in Geneva.*

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