

## Special session on equitable access

### High level statements

#### Importance of international cooperation to secure equitable access to water globally

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In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council recognized access to water and sanitation as a human right and a legal obligation. Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) No 7 further defined the goal that the number of people not having access clean water and adequate sanitation should be reduced by half by 2015. However, in 2011, 19 million people still did not have access to improved water sources and 67 million people lacked access to improved sanitation facilities in the pan-European region. More than 13.000 children under the age of 14 dies every year from water related diarrhoea. At the same time Europe is now the only continent in the world where progress concerning sanitation challenges seems to be stagnating. This is alarming information

The main theme of the Protocol on Water and Health is to safeguard access to safe water supply. In this respect Governments should take all appropriate measures to improve access to water and sanitation on an *equitable* basis for all members of the population.

Safe water supply and adequate sanitation services are of fundamental importance for public health and are essential to all development efforts. The current situation is unacceptable, and governments in the pan-European region need to give water and health higher priority in national development plans. Equally, donors should consider increasing investment in these activities. The cooperation between the EBRD and the UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health is promising and can contribute to that Partners can provide increased access to necessary means to implement the specific goals and concrete targets on how to improve access to safe water supply.

While water supply is essential, it is also important to pay adequate attention to how to secure *equitable access* to safe water supply. The Protocol on Water and Health stipulates that “equitable access to water and sanitation, adequate in both quantity and quality, should be provided for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion”. It is further stressed that “special consideration should be given to the protection of people who are particularly vulnerable to water-related diseases”.

In order to safeguard that no one is left behind; three particular dimensions should be observed:

- Geographical differences in access and price gaps for service provided
- Discrimination and exclusion in access to services by vulnerable and marginalized groups
- Financial affordability by users

Countries, and Member States, have different possibilities to reach these goals and the international society, including international financial institutions, should therefore more

targeted assist those countries in need of financial support to develop and improve equitable access to safe water supply.

As a result of differences between countries in terms of availability of water resources, socio-economic development, access and public policies- efforts should be made by all countries to realize the goal of equitable access for all. By establishing a co-operation between EBRD and the Protocol, these institutions have demonstrated how such cooperation can be mutually beneficiary for the organizations and in particular being supportive for Member Countries needing financial assistance to implement the targets set under the Protocol. This cooperation has the potential to offer a possibility to safeguard equitable access to all members of the country's population.

While each country has the obligation to provide water and sanitation to all, the international community should contribute to, and with common effort, ensuring that the water quality and that the water bill is affordable for all. This requires a long term strategy and, and we welcome the inventive cooperation UNECE, WHO and EBRD has initiated and which has the potential to bring us closer to the implementation of the Millennium Goals.