

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, U.S. Congress

Realizing the Right to Safe Water and Sanitation

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Testimony by:

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Safe Drinking Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene for All

Thank you to co-Chairs Congressman Jim McGovern and Congressman Frank Wolf for convening us, and for your cosponsorship of last Congress' Water for the World Act.

I also want to also acknowledge Tom Lantos, an outstanding American who through his life and career inspired many in America and around the world to join him in the fight for what is right. I am honored to testify before a commission bearing his name and I am confident he would be proud of this Commission's work today.

We at the WASH Advocacy Initiative are grateful for Congress' bipartisan leadership on the water and sanitation issue. Many members of the Human Rights Commission have been strong supporters of the Water for the Poor Act over the years.

My personal commitment to water and sanitation began in the 1990s working on democracy and governance programs throughout Africa. I learned that democracy requires a great deal of work, and that democracy - and even basic security and stability - is a struggle for those people fighting to get enough food, water, and healthcare to keep their children alive, strong, and in school. I was thus drawn to advocating for safe, affordable, and sustainable access to drinking water and sanitation for the greatest number of people worldwide. Water is a fundamental human necessity in its own right and vital to sustainable progress in health, education, gender equity, and poverty alleviation.

There remain almost one billion people on the planet without safe drinking water, and 2.6 billion without adequate sanitation facilities. More than 25 diseases caused by inadequate water and sanitation create 10% of the global public health burden. They kill two million people a year (90% of whom are children under five: more children than from AIDS, TB and malaria combined) and trigger 50% of the world's malnutrition.

This is preventable.

Pint-size coffins suck.

The world does not need to bury millions more of its children in the coming years when we know how to prevent waterborne disease today. And each dollar invested in water and sanitation leads to an 8:1 return from reduced healthcare costs and time savings.

The WASH Advocacy Initiative is a collaborative advocacy effort designed to get safe, affordable, and sustainable drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene to more people in developing countries. We are fully supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the Wallace Genetic Foundation, and by four nonprofits: Water.org, the Global Water Challenge, Water For People, and CARE. Many more organizations working actively on WASH advocacy are here in the room today including WaterAid, PSI, Millennium Water Alliance, PATH.

Whether it is described as a human right or simply as the right thing to do, the important goal is that everyone across the globe has access to safe, affordable, and sustainable drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene.

The message we want to leave you with is: the global water and sanitation challenge is solvable, it is being solved sustainably by communities all over the world, and we are doing what we can to accelerate those solutions.

We humbly request the U.S. government to:

- 1) Preserve funding for foreign assistance, while providing the oversight necessary to ensure it is well-spent.
- 2) Continue to appropriate funds to fully implement the Water for the Poor Act. A recent report from WaterAid, NRDC, and CARE concludes that the implementation of the Act is moving in the right direction, but not fast enough. The WASH sector applauds the appointment of Chris Holmes as Global Water Coordinator at USAID as a significant step forward.
- 3) Increase the effectiveness of WASH assistance, e.g.:
 - a. Provide increased oversight
 - b. Promote monitoring and evaluation over longer periods of time
 - c. Promote more interagency coordination
 - d. Encourage the U.S. Department of State and USAID to develop a true strategy to fully implement the Water for the Poor Act
- 4) Improve the targeting of WASH assistance by directing as many resources as possible to countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America where the need for first-time access to WASH is most severe and where assistance could be particularly transformative.

These actions will likely:

- catalyze more support from foundations, corporations, and civic organizations like Rotary International and the Lions Club International Foundation
- inspire more support from faith-based groups around the United States
- encourage powerful grassroots organizations like charity: water and ONE to do even more for safe water

Our goal today is to inspire the U.S. to do more. This is a genuine leadership opportunity for the U.S. to seize. It is a grave but solvable challenge which can save millions of lives, unite Americans, and improve the image of the U.S. abroad.

These are unsure times on Capitol Hill and beyond. But none of us are worried about our children dying from easily preventable waterborne disease today. Water-related death and disease have traditionally been unavoidable; let us together make them unacceptable.

Thank you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and its co-Chairs Congressman McGovern and Congressman Wolf, and to the UUSC for the opportunity.

The entire WASH sector is grateful for your support and interest and we look forward to working with you.