

Speech Hans Blokland MEP.

29th Januari 2008, Brussels.

High-level policy dialogue on “ EU Sanitation Policies and Practices in the 2008 International Year Sanitation”.

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

We cannot speak about sanitation without speaking about water. Both issues are intertwined. Water is both the source of and a solution for poor sanitation. Poor sanitation is a serious problem faced worldwide, mostly in underdeveloped countries. In Europe, according to the World Health Organization and UNICEF, most sanitation problems can be found in the Eastern Part of Europe. These countries are characterized by a land climate. This means: hot and dry summers and cold winters. This causes severe problems in water supply. Often this water scarcity leads to a policy focus on how to improve the water supply. Of course this is a logical way to cope with the problem, however, this is not enough. You have to ensure a *safe* water supply. Mainly in underdeveloped countries surface water is severe polluted by human faeces (due to a lack of sanitation infrastructure) and by industrial hazardous substances. This causes several diseases, for example diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid fever, different kinds of hepatitis and different kinds of infections. Without sufficient medical care this can lead to death. Therefore it is of big importance that we try to stop these unnecessary sufferings.

- Firstly by improving sanitation infrastructure, and, important, maintaining it when having improved it. Everyone has to gain access to a sufficient sanitation infrastructure.
- Secondly by increasing public awareness. You have to raise awareness about the risks the people are facing currently. And you have to raise awareness about the utility of sanitation infrastructure. Why should you improve sanitation infrastructure when the people who have to use it don't know how to use it?
- Thirdly, improving overall water quality. People use water for everything in their life, for cooking and washing, for bathing and drinking and so on. In this way water can be part of a solution for the problem.

The mentioned priorities can be covered by several kinds of institutions. Not only governments are an important actor, but in my opinion NGO's can play a huge role as well, especially in the first two priorities mentioned. NGO's can play an important role in enhancing sanitation infrastructure, especially when they transfer knowledge and technology from well-developed countries. NGO's can also play an important role in raising awareness in affected countries. They can set up local projects to improve the bad sanitation situation. They also can campaign in well-developed countries in order to show the poor situation with regard to sanitation in underdeveloped countries. By doing this they can collect money to fulfill their mission. But nevertheless, besides the NGO's, the governments (both national and regional as well as local governments) have to focus attention on the problem. The World Health Organization can play an important steering role in it. Governments have to raise funds for improving sanitation infrastructure and awareness campaigns. Furthermore they have to restrict hazardous emissions in surface water and groundwater. This can be done by proposing emission restrictions to industrial emitters. It can also be done by improving water treatment, especially waste water treatment. In the light of this I can mention the waste water directive which is in force in the European Union and which obliges member states to take care of sufficient waste water treatment installations in every local community. Although at the moment not every member state performs very well, there are a few member states in which one fulfilled the obligations with regard to treatment of waste water. Examples are Austria and The Netherlands. Those governments could exchange their experiences with governments

which are not able to manage the sanitation problems in a right way. Both inside the EU and outside the EU. In my eyes working together among NGO's, governments and the World Health Organization is the key for success in finding a solution for the sanitation problems. The 2008 International Year of Sanitation is an incentive to make the way clear for an even more tough cooperation among those parties to manage it.

Thank you,

Hans Blokland MEP