

While in Beijing the Olympic torch doesn't light up the subject of human rights yet, among those overlooked by the international community there is also the right to water, a resource necessary to development in every part of the world. Heavy delay also on the seventh Millennium Goal which aims at the halving of the number of people who can't access basic health-sanitary services

### **IN PURSUIT OF THE SEVENTH GOAL**

The United Nations General Assembly has declared this the *International Year of Sanitation*. The international community is greatly lagging behind with respect to Millennium Development Goal No. 7, which calls for reduction by half of the number of persons without access to basic hygiene and health services by 2015: **if the current trend continues unchecked, 2.4 billion people will still be deprived of these services in 2015. Currently, 2.6 billion among the world's population live without these services** and this is a contributing factor in the death of thousands of women and children daily for causes that are largely preventable, like the consequences of diarrhea.

In fact, only Asia, North Africa and Latin America are on track to achieve the goal of halving the percentage of population deprived of hygienic services by 2015. Elsewhere progress is too slow or totally lacking. In Sub-Saharan Africa the number of persons living in housing without latrines and sewers rose from 335 million in 1990 to 440 million in 2004.

**UNICEF reminds us that there are 980 million children in the world without access to adequate hygienic services. Simple measures like regular hand washing with soap could reduce the infections that cause diarrhea, the second most frequent cause of infant mortality between the ages of 0 and 5.** It is the children who pay the highest price in terms of mortality, lost opportunities for schooling, sickness, malnourishment and poverty.

Some of important conferences on public hygiene are planned for 2008, with the goals of diffusing "best practices", including those applicable within the school context, and of accelerating development in this field.

### **WHETHER WATER IS NOT FOR EVERYONE**

Over 75% of our planet is water, but there are still many who are forced to do without this precious element of development. These are the numbers: 1.6 billion people do not have access to drinking water; 2.6 billion are without any health services; one million eight hundred thousand children die every year due to illnesses related to the lack of water resources.

Among the initiatives planned for World Water Day, March 20, there is one launched by CIPSI (Coordination of popular international solidarity

initiatives), a three year "Free the water" campaign of promoting awareness, information **and fund raising to finance 14 projects in areas afflicted with dire poverty. The initiatives will grant access to drinking water and will safeguard the health and environment of over 400,000 persons in 13 Countries of Africa** (Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda), Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador and Haiti) and Asia (Cambodia, Palestine and Sri Lanka). These partnership initiatives will guarantee a concrete right to drinking water by bringing it to schools, health clinics and villages, with particular attention to the protection of water resources and training with respect to health, hygiene, the environment and water purification.

### **POVERTY IS FEMALE**

Women make up 70% of the world's 1.3 billion poor who live on less than one dollar per day. Women farmers represent a fourth of the world's population, but own less than 2% of the land and receive 1% of the credits distributed for agricultural projects; 80% of humans who are trafficked and sold are women, and they also account for 61% of Aids victims in Africa. Nor is there comfort to be found in the area of gender with respect to holders of political office: female Heads of State number 13 and, as of January 2007, women held a mere 17% of total seats in parliaments. This is detailed in the ActionAid Report, published in collaboration with the Inter-University Research Center for sustainable development, "The gender dimension in development cooperation". The statistics, as stated in the report, "point to injustice and inequalities and represent the condition which has been defined 'the feminization of poverty'".

**Until the rights of women have been recognized by institutions as playing a central role in the pursuit of sustainable and effective development, it will be difficult to imagine progress being made in the battle against poverty.** Consequently there is a need for international cooperation committed to full participation by women in decision making at the local, national and international levels, and for transformation of the social, economic and political structures that are today responsible for institutionalizing gender discrimination.



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### THE FIVE RINGS DEPRIVED OF RIGHTS

“By assigning the Games to Beijing, you will be assisting the development of human rights”. These were the words used by Kiu Jingmin, Vice-President of the Beijing Olympic Committee in April 2001, to convince the International Olympic Committee to award the 2008 Olympic Games to China.

Today, on the eve of the great event, **China is juggling fireworks and a blackout of information, a worldwide television broadcast of the celebration and censure of reporting on human rights violations, sportive pomp and circumstance and the exploitation of child labor in the preparations of the Olympics.** In early March over a thousand protestors, some wrapped in gauze stained with fake blood and wearing the Olympic rings around their necks, marched in New Delhi. A Congress of Young Tibetans activist, Jigme Yeshe, explained that the bandages were meant to demonstrate that the International Olympic Committee had committed a great injustice in granting China the right to host the Olympic Games.

Not to mention the brutal repression of activists’ protests, who demand recognition of civil rights in Tibet. Each year approximately 3,000 Tibetans travel across Nepal, mostly using four Himalayan mountain passes, on the road to Dharamsala. On March 10 hundreds of Tibetans in exile started a six-month march from India to Tibet, to protest against Chinese occupation and the Olympic Games to be held in Beijing.

A number of months ago 37 intellectuals and activists against the Olympiads and for human rights published an “open letter” in which they listed seven demands to truly prepare China for the Olympic Games. A number of these demands are: a general amnesty for all prisoners of conscience; freedom of the press for Chinese and foreign journalists; fair compensation for all victims of forced evictions and expropriations carried out in connection with construction of Olympic venues; fair pay and independent unions for migrant workers employed on Olympic project work sites; and an independent Committee to oversee the use of public money and prosecute waste and corruption connected with Olympic projects. There is likelihood of a long wait for a concrete response to these demands.

### CENSURE ON THE INTERNET

In countries with governments hostile to democracy and freedom, the Internet often represents the only means to interface with the rest of the world and to make one’s voice heard. **On March 12 Reporters Without Borders launched its first international day for liberty of expression on the Internet. Over 21,000 web surfers “cyber-protested” against web censorship in Burma, China, North Korea, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.**

Over 60 “cyber-dissidents” are currently in jail for having exercised their freedom of expression on the web. China has been confirmed as the largest prison for online journalists and bloggers.

