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SPECIAL PROCEDURES OF
THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

**Mandate of the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations
related to
access to safe drinking water and sanitation**

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**Message from the UN Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations
related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation**

**Conference: "Human Rights in Moldova - with a special focus on the new human right to
water and sanitation"**

22 March 2011

Dear friends,

I am pleased to share this message with you on the occasion of World Water Day 2011. I regret that I cannot be with you in Moldova for this important event.

As you know, history was made in the past 8 months. On 28 July 2010, the UN General Assembly recognized the right to water and sanitation. On 30 September 2010, the UN Human Rights Council further specified that this right is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, which is a human right explicitly consecrated in many international human rights instruments.

This recognition is a critical step forward, but now we had to address the question on how to translate these legal standards into reality. Human rights are not just theoretical nor are they idealistic unachievable goals. They provide a framework which can guide the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes on water and sanitation.

As you will discuss today, the human rights to water and sanitation require that these are accessible, available, affordable, acceptable and safe. These services must be delivered without discrimination, access to information and participation must be ensured, and there has to be accountability where authorities fail to meet these obligations.

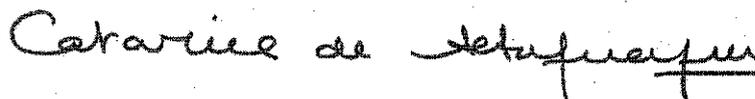
Each of these elements is equally important in ensuring the rights to water and sanitation. Are you enjoying your right to water if you have a tap but the water is unsafe to drink? Where is your right to water when water is abundantly available, but at a cost which is impossible for you to pay? How can we discuss a right to sanitation if toilets are too far away, in unsafe places, or not sensitive to the special needs of women? We face clear violations when we see that only the rich enjoy access to water and sanitation, or when we see explicit political decisions not to connect certain communities because they are perceived as undesirable or illegal.

Human rights are concrete obligations which allow for a holistic understanding of access to water and sanitation. Attention to human rights, while a legally binding obligation, will also produce more sustainable outcomes.

Finally, to me, the most crucial dimension of human rights is its potential to empower people. Water and sanitation are no longer matters of charity which the Government can give or take away. This is a human right, which people can claim. States are accountable to people for this human right, and once people know that they have this right, the entire dynamic changes as they hold their officials to account. On a more personal note, it has an impact on people's sense of dignity since they are no longer simply a recipient of aid, but a rights holder with a legitimate claim.

I wish you a successful event and fruitful discussions, and I look forward to continuing my collaboration with Governments, civil society organizations and experts in order to ensure better protection of the right to water and sanitation around the world.

With my sincere regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Catarina de Albuquerque". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the last part of the name.

Catarina de Albuquerque
Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to
access to safe drinking water and sanitation