

**Women Major Group call in Istanbul:  
Stop the word game, implement the right to water & sanitation.**

Istanbul, 22 March 2009

“Ministers have prepared a ministerial declaration, which unfortunately, goes back in time and seems to forget earlier commitments made by governments to insure the right to water and sanitation” said Sara Ahmed, chair of the Gender & Water Alliance on behalf of the Women & Gender Coalition and Women Major Group today during the closing of the Fifth World water Forum in Istanbul.

CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women already assures the right to water for (rural) women and so does the Children’s Convention; close to 30 countries have already embedded the human right to water and sanitation in their constitutions or national laws. Let’s move forward and implement “, she added.

What is essential is to learn from good practices, how do countries achieve access for all at affordable cost, and have mechanisms to support vulnerable groups which are unable to pay for the service provision of safe water and sanitation.

Women organisation are particularly worried about the lack of access to safe sanitation for school children in many, if not most, countries of this world. Girls need access to school toilets, which are separate from boys, where doors close, where menstruation hygiene is supported, and where girls are not harassed. “Sanitation often does not have sufficient policy priority”. Mrs. Ahmed concluded.

Women’s organisations from across the globe, working together in the Women & Gender Coalition, played a very active role during the Forum. They were joined by women’s organisations from Turkey, who together with Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) organised a pre-conference to the Forum especially for women from the region and decided to continue their cooperation and work in a new alliance and become a member of WfWP.

Earlier this week during the high level panel, convened by the Interagency Taskforce on gender & water of the UN, women’s organisations made proposals for 6 new gender specific indicators to be used by all to make sure gender impact of policies and practise is monitored.

During this session, Siegmien Staphorst, steering Committee member of Women for Water urged the Heads of States and ministers, all leaders in the water and sanitation sectors to adhere to the overarching principle of equity and gender mainstreaming as a prerequisite for sustainable and equitable development. “We urge you to fully commit yourselves to action; to ensure, within your respective jurisdictions, a level playing field for the different major groups in society by creating an enabling environment to fulfil their specific roles”, Staphorst said, concluding her presentation of the recommendations of the women’s organizations.

Other recommendations include:

Create awareness and mobilise different groups in societies for concerted actions, recognition and implementation of land rights and safe tenure for women, Take affirmative actions for enhancing participation of women in decision-making bodies at all levels including setting quotas and creating an enabling environment for participation.

As one of the conclusions of the topic sessions on education and capacity development, convened by WfWP and UNESCO-IHE, Kusum Athokarala (WfWP steering committee), called for ensuring capacity development activities at all levels for women in particular, in order to provide them with knowledge and experience so they can make informed choices, develop careers and contribute concretely to solving the problems in their own environments.

This includes training on water technologies, safe sanitation, water resources management and promoting behavioural change.

---

For more information: please contact Women for Water at [communication@womenforwater.org](mailto:communication@womenforwater.org)  
[www.womenforwater.org](http://www.womenforwater.org)