

PRESS RELEASE -- 13 NOVEMBER 2008

## Civil Society Groups in South Asia to Tell Sanitation Ministers: "Hurry Up! Billions Want to Use the Toilet"

*Pre-meeting, Silent Candlelight Vigil and Press Conference Highlight Grassroots Programme  
16-17 November at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra (International Youth Centre), New Delhi*

**New Delhi, London and Geneva – On behalf of the one million children killed by preventable diarrhoeal disease in the region since 2006, leading international and national civil society organisations will urge ministers at next week's South Asia Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN) in New Delhi to make good on earlier promises to implement pro-poor sanitation programmes.**

One million children have died from diarrhoea in South Asia in the two years since the last SACOSAN conference in 2006<sup>1</sup>. This is the true cost of poor progress on sanitation.

South Asia is dangerously behind in providing the health, dignity and economic well being that comes with access to improved sanitation and will not meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) sanitation target until 2043 – 28 years too late.

"Universal access targets on sanitation have been set in South Asia and changes made, yet governments are still failing to act with the urgency required", says Ramisetty Murali, Convenor of FAN South Asia, which is organising a 16-17 November pre-SACOSAN meeting of 100 grassroots organisations from all over South Asia along with WaterAid and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC). Together with their partners in South Asia, the organisers say that strong political leadership is needed to address this devastating but solvable crisis.

In Dhaka in 2003 and in Islamabad in 2006, the governments of South Asia came together, reviewing progress and making commitments to act. These commitments must be met -- and the International Year of Sanitation 2008 is a prime time to do so -- as a priority and further action must be taken if sanitation for all is to be realised in the region.

Among the calls from grassroots NGOs are 1) improved sector monitoring, measuring totally sanitised communities and related health outcomes; 2) pro-poor sanitation, implementing programmes focusing particularly on the urban poor; 3) improved sanitation facilities to ensure 100% enrolment in girl's schools; and 4) better sector efficiency building capacity to ensure sector allocations are used.

"It is important to look ahead, reassess expectations and see beyond what is possible in sanitation in South Asia", says Murali, "but at the same time we as civil society need to hold the governments of the region accountable in backing up their words with actions." SACOSAN developments will be monitored at [www.wateraid.org/sacosan](http://www.wateraid.org/sacosan).

The pre-meeting representatives will also dedicate a **Silent Candlelight Vigil** on 16 November to all who have died from diarrhoea in the region since 2006. Unspoken during the event will be the fundamental truths that poor sanitation is a major obstacle in the fight to reduce child mortality, diarrhoea is the leading cause of child deaths in South Asia, strong political leadership is urgently needed to address this crisis, and lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools -- especially for girls -- is a barrier for attendance.

### For the Media

(Telephone to Pre-meeting Venue: +91 11 2301 3631. Other media contacts listed below.)

Journalists are welcome to the following:

- **Silent Candlelight Vigil** for those who have died from diarrhoea since 2006. The Vigil begins at 18.30. on 16 November. Representatives from over 100 civil society organisations will participate. This is an excellent photo opportunity for the press
- **Press Conference** on the recommendations from the pre-meeting to SACOSAN. National and international experts will participate in the press conference, which begins at 15.00 on 17 November in at the Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi
- **Interviews** with experts from the region
- **Sacosan Blog** for ongoing updates and photographs: [www.wateraid.org/sacosan](http://www.wateraid.org/sacosan)
- **Book Launch:** WaterAid's *Counting the Cost: Poor Progress on Sanitation in South Asia*

For interviews or more information on country and international perspectives, contact:

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from UNICEF(2008) *Countdown 2015*