



**Catherine Ashton**

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission

Brussels, 18 March 2011  
Our Ref.: B1051

Dear Baroness Ashton,

**EU statement on the rights to water and sanitation for World Water Day**

In view of World Water Day on 23 March, Amnesty International would like to underline the importance for the EU to make a clear statement reaffirming its commitment to the rights to water and sanitation.

We welcomed your recognition that “access to safe drinking water is a component element of the right to an adequate standard of living” in your declaration on World Water Day last year. Subsequent correspondence has highlighted the importance for the EU in promoting international recognition of the right to water based on global consensus. Over the past year, considerable progress has been made by the international community on this front, including in a Resolution adopted by consensus at the Human Rights Council in September 2010. There are now 177 UN member states who have signed up to at least one international declaration affirming water and sanitation as rights, and this broad agreement mirrors the clear position consistently taken by many international expert bodies, in particular the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In this context, the recognition of the rights to water and sanitation as distinct but related rights is essential. The inclusion of the right to sanitation echoes international obligations, and the reality of many people whose rights are violated on a daily basis. Amnesty International’s research shows that the consequences of neglecting sanitation are dire and is one of the primary causes of infant mortality. Lack of access to a toilet in or next to the home particularly affects women, who become extremely vulnerable to acts of violence. Further evidence can be found in two reports recently published by Amnesty International, *Risking Rape to reach the toilet: women's experiences in the slums of Nairobi* and *Insecurity and Indignity: Women's experiences in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya*.

Amnesty International therefore calls on the EU to live up to its commitments to the full realisation of all human rights and to make a statement at the occasion of World Water Day which:

- Reflects the international concord which now exists on the rights to water and sanitation
- Re-affirms that the rights to water and sanitation are derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the rights to life and health
- Re-affirms states’ obligations to realise the right of every person to sufficient, safe, affordable and accessible water and sanitation

We thank you for your attention and stand ready to provide any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Nicolas J. Beger  
Director