



Protect the human rights to water and sanitation in informal settlements. Oral intervention at the 21st session of the UN Human Rights Council (10-28 September)

AI Index: IOR 41/023/2012
12 September 2012

Item 3¹: Clustered Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation *Oral statement*²

Madam President,

Amnesty International welcomes the report on 'Stigma and the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation', which examines in a concrete way how stigmatization in the context of water and sanitation affects members of a wide range of groups; the report also offers practical recommendations on how to overcome those challenges.

We regret that in the debate today, some States have seemed to suggest that members of certain groups are not worthy of the protection offered by the cornerstone international law principle of non-discrimination. To those who propose an 'à la carte' approach to nondiscrimination, we recall that the human right to freedom from discrimination benefits every person. A pick and choose approach leaves no one truly secure that she or he will be free from persecution on the basis of identity.

Madam President,

We share the Special Rapporteur's assessment that that slums and informal settlements are often not taken into account in urban planning. Gaps in access to water and sanitation in urban areas are primarily due to the failure of governments to recognise and make provision for informal settlements. It is often political and legal obstacles not lack of resources that is at the root of this problem. With the growing levels of urbanisation worldwide, refusal to provide services to people living in slums will contribute to massive denial of the rights to water and sanitation.

Amnesty International has documented the stigma faced by Roma leading to forced evictions, absence of social housing, and consequent denial of their rights to water and sanitation. For example, after a forced eviction of 240 families from the Belvil informal settlement in Belgrade, five families were resettled in an abandoned warehouse in the city Nis. The authorities failed to turn on the water in the warehouse for 3 months. It was only after campaigning by local NGOs and Amnesty International, and the election of a new

¹ Item 3 on the agenda of the Human Rights Council: *Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.*

² See also Amnesty International public statement, *United Nations: States must recognise and not undermine the content of the rights to water and sanitation* (Index: IOR 41/020/2012), available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/IOR41/020/2012/en>

mayor, that water was provided. This demonstrates the importance of political will, or the lack thereof, to the realisation of the rights to water and sanitation.

Madam de Albuquerque, in your view, in addition to the more technical solutions you have proposed, what additional social and political measures by political leaders would you propose to spread awareness and demonstrate political will for the need to respect the rights of the most marginalised persons?

Thank you Madam President. Thank you Madam de Albuquerque.