



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

United Kingdom of Northern Ireland and Great Britain

National Explanation of Vote on UN Human Rights Resolution 64/292 of 28 July 2010

The UK has abstained on this resolution today both for reasons of substance and of procedure.

On substance, we do not believe there exists, at present, sufficient legal basis under international law to 'declare' (or 'recognise') either water or sanitation as freestanding human rights. Neither a right to water nor a right to sanitation have been agreed upon in any UN human rights treaty, nor is there evidence that they exist in customary international law.

We do believe there is a right to water as an element of the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living. We also believe that inadequate sanitation has a negative impact on the protection of human rights – for example the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

On procedure, we are disappointed that this resolution cuts across, and pre-empts, the work underway in the Human Rights Council in Geneva on this subject. We supported the resolution which established the *Independent Expert on the Issue of Human Rights Obligations Related to Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation*, and the resolution on *Human Rights and Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation* of September last year. In view of the complexities of the issues at stake, the work in Geneva has been progressing in a careful and consensual

manner. It is unfortunate that this initiative has pre-empted the outcome of this work.

The UK is very concerned about the impact inadequate access to water and poor sanitation has on the full enjoyment of human rights. Furthermore, sanitation and drinking water underpin all aspects of human and economic development. If current trends continue, it is estimated that the Millennium Development Goal on sanitation may not be globally met until 2049.

The UK takes this extremely seriously. We place a very high priority on providing the poorest people in the world with clean water and sanitation as part of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Since March 2008 our bilateral programmes have delivered safe water to 2.7 million people in Africa and 3.1 million in South Asia and have helped 1.8 million people in Africa and 25.5 million people in South Asia gain access to basic sanitation. We are also actively striving through our support to the 'Sanitation and Water for All' initiative to strengthen the global response in the sector, bringing together governments, multilateral agencies and global civil society.

We very much hope that the MDG summit in September will provide much needed attention and impetus to expedite progress against this, and other related MDG targets. We simply regret that this initiative today was not pursued in a manner aimed at reaching consensus.