

Nita M. Lowey, Chair
Frank R. Wolf, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Room HB-26 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Wolf:

We are writing in support of increased funding for U.S. programs to increase access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation is the leading preventable cause of death in the developing world. The fact that 1.1 billion people are without access to safe drinking water and 2.3 billion people are without access to basic sanitation means that millions of girls can't go to school because they need to spend hours walking to gather water for their families and \$380 billion of activity for economic growth are lost because half of the developing world is sick from a water-related disease.

Almost a year and a half ago, Congress passed and the President signed into law the "Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act" (P.L.109-121), which provided specific authorization for water and sanitation foreign assistance programs (Sec. 135 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961) and required the development of a strategy to meet the international commitment to cut in half the percentage of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation. It also expressed the need to devote greater resources to safe drinking water and sanitation for the poor, particularly in countries with the greatest need. To date, most of the requirements in this law have not been met.

In past years, the Committee has generously provided funding for international water programs, including \$200 million in the Fiscal Year 2006 appropriations bill. However, the State Department, in implementing that requirement, has used an overly broad definition of "water" in order to report expenditures at the \$200 million level. According to State Department figures, in 2005 (the most recent figures available), USAID spent almost \$400 million on water. Of that total, only \$275 million was for water supply and sanitation. Of that \$275 million, \$100 million was for reconstruction in Iraq, Afghanistan, West Bank/Gaza and tsunami impacted countries through an emergency supplemental, while approximately another \$100 million was disaster assistance, which falls outside the scope of the Water for the Poor Act. All told, only \$70 million was spent on non-emergency water supply and sanitation, which was the focus of the Water for the Poor Act, of which less than \$10 million went to sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the greatest need. For fiscal year 2008, however, the State Department's budget proposes cuts to less than \$60 million.

For fiscal year 2008, we are requesting \$300 million be specifically allocated for assistance to increase sustainable and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation for the poor, pursuant to the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act. We further request report language expressing concern over the lack of focus on sustainable

and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation for the poor at the highest levels of USAID and the State Department.

We urge the committee to provide funding for assistance to increase sustainable and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation, pursuant to the Water for the Poor Act, as a way to 1) demonstrate the continued intent of Congress that drinking water and sanitation assistance be focused on the countries, people, and places of greatest need and 2) provide additional opportunities for Congressional oversight by both the authorizing and appropriating committees. Given the vast investment deficit in this sector and the growing interest from the private and philanthropic sectors, an increase in public funds is warranted.

Sincerely,

Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)
Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT)