



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

318 EAST 48TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10017
TEL: (212) 826 0840 FAX: (212) 826 2964

**REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR BURHAN GAFOOR PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF SINGAPORE TO THE UN AT THE WORLD TOILET
DAY 2017 PANEL DISCUSSION ON TOILETS AND WASTEWATER ON 20
NOVEMBER 2017, UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

1 Let me start by thanking, first of all, HE Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General. Thank you so much for your presence and your very inspiring words. I would also like to thank all the partners and the co-sponsoring Missions. I also recognize many of my colleague Permanent Representatives here. So good that you could spare your time and also representatives from other Missions. Thank you very much. I know that on a typical day in New York there are so many competing events and the presence of so many of you here is very important to not just the Singapore Mission but also to all the different partners, organizations.

2 I want to say that the World Toilet Day is a reality check, because from the confines of the United Nations (UN) in New York, from the luxurious surroundings of the basement of the UN, it seems like a distant topic – open defecation. The ability to go to the toilet with dignity seems like a very theoretical subject, and seems like a very unclean issue to be talking about in dignified company. While frankly, the reality for billions of people, and you have heard the figures, is just that: unclean with the lack of dignity while performing some of the most essential functions of human life. So I think this is a reality check that is worthwhile doing once a year. Today happens to be Universal Children’s Day, so imagine the ordeal for children, not to mention women. I think it is really unthinkable that the basic rights of so many people are being violated in such an undignified way over what may appear to be one of the smallest issues that receives attention when we engage at discussions here in the UN. This is why this event has been important for Singapore.

3 I would start by asking why is Singapore doing this event. Often, people ask us, “Singapore has done this and why are you doing this. We are doing this because the story of Singapore’s transformation is in a sense the story of Singapore’s transformation through sanitation. We are quite proud of the economic transformation that we have achieved in 50 years. And essential to that transformation has been mastering and controlling the sanitation cycle, and related

to that the water cycle. So we think that it is doable. This problem faced by billions of people need not continue. The solutions are doable. It can be done, of course, with political leadership, of course, with the government playing an active role, and of course with partnership with so many partners around the world. So that is the reason why we, if you like, are obsessed with the issue, even though when we first proposed this idea, it did elicit a fair degree of jokes and laughter and it continues to do so. But we are thick-skinned in Singapore, because we think that this is a real problem around the world and there is no reason why we should turn a blind eye to this issue.

4 The second question is why are toilets important. I think the Deputy Secretary-General has said it very eloquently. I think central to the sustainable development challenge is frankly the whole question of sanitation. I think toilets are enablers of sustainable development. So if we fix our toilets right, I think there are so many side benefits in terms of how education, reduction of disease, not to mention poverty eradication. If you look at the Sustainable Development Goals and if you look at water and sanitation that is so central to resolving so many of the other issues in the 2030 Agenda framework.

5 The last question I want to ask is what can we do. I think the Chef de Cabinet plus also the Deputy Secretary-General spoke about this. Awareness is certainly important. I think it is good to have an annual check of reality, annual prick of the conscience, but that is not enough. I think what we need to do is turn that awareness into action and attention in almost everything that we do, either as diplomats at the UN when we negotiate resolutions to keep the spotlight on WASH issues – water, sanitation and hygiene, and also as private sector partners or civil society. I think it is really important that we keep the focus on every different dimension of the issue. And of course ultimately, it all must lead to action because action is needed to make the change on the ground. The good news is that there are so many partners who are willing to be part of the solution, willing to be part of the action. Many of them are here, from the private sector, from civil society. I hope that this discussion will not only generate greater interest and awareness but also lead to concrete action for Member States.

6 I think the role of the UN and UN Water have been critical and I take this opportunity to thank UN Water and all the UN agencies, in a sense the UN development system, plus all the different partners here, who are represented, also from the private sector and civil society for their continued support. I think they will all be ready to talk with you and work with you, so that we make a difference. Thank you very much.

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