



For immediate publication

WECEF visibly present during World Water Forum 5 in Istanbul

"Economic crisis can offer opportunities for small scale and affordable sustainable sanitation"

Utrecht, March 12, 2009 - **The Fifth World Water Forum which starts next Monday in the Turkish city of Istanbul, offers the last chance to create unity in our thinking on how to achieve Millennium Development Goal number 7 – the MDG on sanitation – according to Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECEF), a network of over one hundred women and environmental organisations in Eastern and Western Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.**

Women in Europe for a Common Future will be present at the World Water Forum 5 from 16-22 of March, in Istanbul, with a delegation of 20 member organisations from the EU, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Several WECF members and staff have been invited to speak at panels on the "right to water and sanitation" and on "effects of climate change", and to take part in the Ministerial Round Tables. One member organisation, Katachel from Afghanistan, has been nominated for the prestigious Kyoto Water Prize. In addition to this WECF co-organises two side events together with UN-Water and the UN Water Gender Taskforce.

Economic crisis offers opportunities

"Major technological solutions will not be the answer, when it comes to achieving MDG 7. With only five years to go to 2015 we will have to work on integrated solutions whilst cooperating with women at all levels "says Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director of WECF.

The key to the problem lies therefore, according to WECF, in providing solutions to local people themselves; simple, direct and safe solutions that are affordable for locals and can be maintained easily. EcoSan toilets for instance, do not only protect drinking water, they produce valuable fertilizer as well, which farmers can use for agriculture purposes. This reduces costs and increases their yields." The economic crisis in this way can offer opportunities to achieve valuable and efficient solutions for the poor with little money.

The work of WECF member and nominee Katachel in Afghanistan is such an example of a small scale, sustainable and affordable solution. In Northern Afghanistan WECF and Katachel have already built around 400 ecosan toilets, which has improved the health and environment in the region considerably. On top of that twenty schools including a grammar school, 770 waterwells, 60 kilometre of roads and bridges, benefits for 300 widows and 170 (mud) homes have been built. These are a few of the humanitarian achievements of a remarkable German woman, Sybille Schneehage, who has been helping a rural community in the north Afghanistan province of Kunduz since 1994; a perfect example of well spent Dutch development aid money.

Safe and affordable for all toilets

The lack of proper sanitation is not only an issue in the developing world, also in some parts of Europe. "A lack of safe sanitary facilities, causing water pollution and disease is still a daily practice for

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20 to 23 million Europeans within the European Union. In some EU member states, like Romania, almost 40% of the population does not have access to safe sanitation. This is unacceptable and leads to significant health risks, "says Margriet Samwel, water coordinator of WECF.

The WECF programme includes the following events:

On Monday 16th of March, WECF co-organises together with the UN Taskforce on Gender and Water a special high-level session on **Gender, Water and Sanitation** from 14:30 - 19:00 hours. WECF member organisation Central Asian Alliance for Water will present its activities and results.

In preparation of the Gender special session, WECF as member of the UN-Water Taskforce on Gender and Water has helped to prepare the background flyer and report for the meeting, both of them based on an expert group meeting organized by UN-DESA in December 2008.

On Tuesday 17th March, WECF co-organises the European Regional high level plenary, from 17:00 - 18:00. WECF member Anna Tsvetkova of MAMA-86 will be speaking on the first panel, WECF is in charge of organising the second panel on **Sanitation in the European Region**. The goals of the session are:

- * to raise awareness of the fact that 20 Million people in the EU lack access to safe sanitation and more than 10 Million in the European region (WHO definition). Europe is the continent with the widest gap between good and bad sanitation situation.
- * to take the momentum of the International Year of Sanitation further
- * to realise the need for Sustainable and Affordable Sanitation in all parts of Europe
- * to find solutions and to push towards Sustainable and Affordable Sanitation on practical and on policy level

WECF has an exhibition stand together with other European organisations in the European Pavillion in Foyer 1 at the Sütlüce Congress Centre

WECF

The right to safe and affordable water and sanitation is one of the main missions of WECF, Women in Europe for a Common Future. WECF is a network of more than 100 organisations in 40 countries. WECF mobilises women to find affordable solutions to the environmental health problems in their communities and encourages women to participate in decisionmaking.

Note to the editors: Not for publication

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Documents:

"Making Sustainable Sanitation work for women and men - integrating a gender perspective into sanitation initiatives" is [now downloadable](#)

This publication is meant to give background information on the pressing need to integrate a gender perspective into the efforts to promote safe and sustainable sanitation. It provides guidance on how to mainstream gender into this sector.

[More information on WECF's activities in Istanbul](#)

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