

MEDIA RELEASE

'Keep Water Safe' Movement Launched in Shashemene

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, 3 April 2007: The WASH Ethiopia Movement launched its 'Keep Water Safe' 2007 Movement in a public ceremony on Sunday 1 April 2007 to raise awareness of the links between safe water and reducing life-threatening illness. Key WASH partners including federal ministers used the event to re-affirm their commitment to bring safe drinking water to all Ethiopians.

Water quality has often been ignored in favour of water quantity in Ethiopia. This is leading to the contamination of water supplies creating a heightened risk of disease outbreaks and undermining efforts to improve public health.

In Ethiopia, one in six children dies before their fifth birthday. Diarrhea, a water-borne disease, is attributable to over 22 per cent of these deaths.

The WASH Ethiopia (short for water, sanitation and hygiene) Movement is a broad coalition aiming to promote mass-mobilisation. Established in 2004, it encourages social and political commitments to the sector by campaigning on a different WASH-related issue every year.

To launch the 'Keep Water Safe' movement for 2007, youth-groups, schools and leading figures from WASH Ethiopia's coalition of NGOs, UN agencies, religious leaders and the government joined together in Shashemene's football stadium to promote the importance of safe water to the town's inhabitants and assembled media.

At the ceremony, UNICEF WASH chief Belinda Abraham commented on the importance of public participation, she said: "Keeping precious water free of biological and chemical contaminants is important...In order to do this we need mass-mobilisation of people, minds, commitment and efforts.

"Each one of us in our own way can collectively and individually make a difference."

Both Ethiopian Minister of Water H.E. Asfaw Dingamo and the State Minister for Health H.E. Dr Kebede Worku attended the ceremony. Dr Kebede re-emphasised the link between Acute Watery Diarrhea and low awareness, low water supply coverage and poor personal hygiene. He called on everyone in the sector to work hard to ensure its eradication.

The WASH Ethiopia Movement showcased new performances that will form part of its future advocacy campaigns, including two new dramas both highlighting the dangers of unsafe drinking water. A circus group also performed acrobatics in 'Keep Water Safe' T-shirts whilst a local reggae artist, representing Shashemene's Rastafarian culture, performed songs about the importance of safe water.

Onlookers were invited to a demonstration of the new water-treatment method, PuR. The treatment consists of a groundbreaking new flocculant and disinfectant solution within a sachet which transforms dirty, untreated water into a safe drink within minutes and costs 2 birr (\$0.22) per unit.

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UNICEF has pledged US\$15, 000 to assist the Movement in its advocacy campaign, media engagements, social mobilisation and continuous monitoring and evaluation of Ethiopian water quality throughout 2007.

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