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Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP
Secretary of State

26th
May 2012

My Dear Chris,

Thank you for your letter of 15 May to the Prime Minister about CAFOD's 'Thirst for Change' campaign. I am replying as Secretary of State for International Development.

Let me start by congratulating you on the success of the campaign, I received a huge amount of correspondence from CAFOD supporters on this topic, particularly from school children. It is really encouraging to know that young people in the UK care so deeply about the problems facing others around the world.

Thank you for your kind words of support regarding the announcement I made at the recent Sanitation and Water for All High Level meeting in Washington. The meeting of more than 60 ministers responsible for finance, sanitation and hygiene portfolios from both developed and developing countries led to a number of critical commitments to enhance support for global access to sanitation and water.

It is encouraging that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target on drinking water has been met. This is an extraordinary achievement and proof that well-spent aid can make a real difference to the lives of the world's poorest people. But it remains the case that many people are still without clean water, and there is disparity between regions, as well as rich and poor. Clearly, there is still much work yet to be done. Access to sanitation is one of the most off-track MDGs and access to water remains off-track in Sub-Saharan Africa.



As you state in your letter, it is truly shocking that even today, over 780 million people do not have access to clean water and 2.5 billion people do not have proper sanitation. It is these statistics that led to my decision to double our already ambitious commitment on water and sanitation that we made last year, so that the UK will now reach more than 60 million people - providing access to basic services such as communal hand pumps and pit latrines, as well as improved hygiene. We will achieve this through a range of measures, including challenging charities and the private sector to compete for support on the basis of the value for money they offer.

Basically, over this Parliament we will provide water and sanitation to the same number of people in the developing world as there are in the UK.

But as you correctly point out, the UK cannot meet the MDG targets alone, and this is why, at the high-level meeting, I called on all those attending to make the WaSH sector a higher political priority and attract more resources in order to meet these needs. We need political prioritisation and sustained commitment to evidence-based results, especially in the hard to reach places, because as we already know, the economic benefits of investing in water and sanitation are significant.

I hope that this will reassure you that the UK Government is serious about making strong progress towards achieving all the MDGs, including the targets on water and sanitation.

With my best wishes,
Yours ever,
Andrew

ANDREW MITCHELL