

Singapore champions sanitation on first World Toilet Day

November 19 2013

Singapore called Tuesday for greater efforts to improve sanitation in developing countries as it celebrated the inaugural UN World Toilet Day, an initiative by the cleanliness-obsessed island republic.

Grace Fu, second minister for the environment and water resources, told a conference on the subject that 80 percent of an estimated 2.5 billion people without access to basic sanitation worldwide live in Asia.

"Much still needs to be done as inadequate sanitation is a primary reason for the spread of infectious diseases, which in turn leads to increased healthcare costs and loss of productivity," she said.

The United Nations estimates that 1.1 billion people around the world defecate in the open, and almost 2,000 children die every day from preventable diarrhoeal diseases.

Poor sanitation and water supply also result in economic losses estimated at \$260 billion annually in developing countries, according to the UN.

In July it designated November 19 as World Toilet Day following a proposal by Singapore, whose envoy said he did not care if people made jokes about the campaign.

"I am sure there will be laughter among the press and the public when it is reported that the UN is declaring a World Toilet Day," Singapore charge d'affaires Mark Neo said in July before a unanimous General

Assembly vote in favour of the measure.

"Their laughter is welcome, especially if they recognise the prevailing and unhealthy taboo that prevents an open and serious discussion of the problems of sanitation and toilets globally," Neo told the assembly.

Singapore took up the cause because of the efforts of Jack Sim, a citizen of the city-state known as "Mr Toilet" because of his efforts to improve sanitation around the world.

The businessman is the founder of the World Toilet Organisation, which promotes [sanitation](#) through advocacy, technology, education and creating business opportunities for toilet-related companies in developing nations.

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Citation: Singapore champions sanitation on first World Toilet Day (2013, November 19)
retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-11-singapore-champions-sanitation-world-toilet.html>

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