

Global Toilet Crisis 'Kills More Than COVID-19' Says Gospel for Asia

More people will die from diseases linked to lack of toilets and poor sanitation than from COVID-19 this year, a leading humanitarian agency has warned.

So far this year, more than 1.2 million deaths worldwide have been attributed to the pandemic, but it's likely millions more will die from exposure to diseases carried by human waste—diseases that don't make the headlines.

As millions across the developing world relieve themselves in the open, raw sewage spawns a multitude of deadly diseases. Excrement attracts flies that quickly spread diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, typhoid, polio and hepatitis A.

UNICEF, the U.N. children's agency, said 2.2 million people worldwide will die this year from diarrhea alone—nearly double the number of COVID-19 deaths recorded so far.

Many of those deaths—mostly children under 5—could be avoided if the world's poor had access to safe, sanitary toilets and hand-washing facilities, according to Gospel for Asia (GFA World,), a Texas-based Christian organization that builds thousands of new toilets across Asia every year.

Report Reveals Toilet Misery

The misery of the 4.2 billion people—over half the world's population—who don't have a toilet at home or safe sanitation is revealed in a shocking new GFA World report, *Fight Against Open Defecation Continues*, marking World Toilet Day on Thursday, Nov. 19.

Open defecation is when people go to the toilet outside in the

open—in the street, in a park or by a river, for example—a common practice in many poor countries. Just a fleck of human feces might contain 100 million viruses, one million bacteria and 1,000 parasites that can be transmitted through cuts, skin pores, contaminated water or food.

Even when people have access to public toilets, they're often unsafe, conditions can be horrible and many people don't use them. In many Asia megacities, latrines often flush into open drains that flow along the streets.

"For billions of people around the world, simply going to the toilet is degrading, unhygienic and even dangerous," said GFA World founder K.P. Yohannan.

In 2018, a 3-year-old South African boy fell into a feces-filled pit latrine and drowned. Others risk being attacked or sexually assaulted while using public toilets at night, so they relieve themselves in the open instead.

"It's easy for us in America to never give it a second thought, because we don't have to walk a mile or more to the nearest public toilet or pit latrine," said Yohannan, author of *Never Give Up*.

'Catastrophic Health Consequences'

The global "toilet tragedy" has caught the attention of Hollywood actor Matt Damon and India Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who have highlighted the catastrophic health consequences.

Dozens of international agencies are working on innovative solutions, including solar-powered toilets that convert human waste into fertilizer.

Last year, GFA World workers built more than 5,400 toilets and latrines across Asia and educated communities about the importance of using them.

“I never imagined that we’d measure the impact of our Christian faith by the number of toilets we build,” said Yohannan, “but the reality is that people see from our actions that God’s people really do care about them.” {eoa}