

Message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. BAN Ki-moon, to the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme at its twenty-fourth session

1. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the beginning of the 24th Governing Council of UN-Habitat.

2. Since 2007, when for the first time the world population living in urban areas passed the fifty per cent mark, the process of urbanization has continued unabated. The majority of the world's urban growth is taking place in developing countries, where many urban centers already have inadequate infrastructure and where many authorities are looking for ways to respond adequately to the demands of their rapidly expanding urban populations, especially the young and the poor.

3. We know that the Millennium Development Goals target of improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 has already been surpassed. Unfortunately, because of rapid urbanization, there are more slum dwellers now than there were in 2000. Worldwide, 2.5 billion people are still without basic sanitation. Although the target for drinking water was met, more than 780 million still lack access to an improved source and many challenges remain. For example, less than 20 per cent of the cities in developing countries currently have their wastewater treated. We also know that cities, mostly in the developed world, are contributing significantly to climate change, accounting for up to 70 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

4. However, the shift towards a dominantly urban world is not simply a demographic phenomenon, nor is it all negative. Urban centers represent perhaps the biggest opportunity to promote sustainable approaches to the management of our common resources and can be a major force to reduce poverty. It is a force which, if effectively steered and deployed, will help the world to overcome some of its most pressing global challenges. Governments recognized this in paragraph 134 of the Rio+20 outcome document, *The Future We Want*, in which they stated that, "... if they are well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies."

5. It is important that the Governing Council and UN-Habitat build upon this to enhance the role of sustainable urbanization in human settlements. I am particularly heartened to see the results of UN-Habitat's reform process, which I have viewed as critical to support member states confront these challenges. I know that your support has been crucial in this respect. I am also following carefully the preparatory process for the third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development, known as Habitat III. While we must address the challenges of rapid urbanization, including urban poverty and inequality, we should also take advantage of the opportunities that well planned urbanization offers as a key driver of sustainable development.

6. I am therefore very encouraged that UN-Habitat's proposed Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 and biennial Programme Budget for 2014-2015, which the Governing Council is considering at this

session, address both the challenges and opportunities offered by urbanization. It is also my hope that the Governing Council will provide guidance to the Secretary-General of the Habitat III conference, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 67/216, and that the Council will make progress with the reform of the governance of UN-Habitat.

7. Please accept my best wishes for the success of your deliberations.