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**STATEMENT
BY**

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**FIRST MEETING OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE
FOR THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT
(HABITAT III)**

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Mr. Chairman,

I wish to extend, on behalf of the South African delegation, our congratulations to the Chair on your election and the Bureau. My delegation would like to assure you of our support for a successful preparatory process towards the holding of the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development in 2016.

South Africa has formally submitted its National Report in Nairobi and we have completed all domestic processes in this regard. The South African National Report for Habitat III has been developed in consultation with key stakeholders, which included National Government, Local Authorities and institutions under the Department of Human Settlements. Civil Society and Private Sector Organisations, academic institutions and think-tanks, also contributed. The report indicates how we have fared in implementing the Habitat Agenda, as well as what the priorities for a new global urban agenda could be. It is indeed a very opportune moment to take stock, as 2014 marks the 20th anniversary of the attainment of our freedom and democracy.

Section 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa enshrines the inalienable right to housing. It is therefore Government's responsibility to work progressively towards ensuring that all South Africans have access to secure tenure, housing, basic services, facilities and infrastructure wherever they are located.

We found that indeed there is a lot to celebrate. Over the past 20 years of government's housing programme, over 2.8 million completed houses and units, and just over 876 000 serviced sites, were delivered, allowing approximately 12.5 million people access to accommodation and a fixed asset. About 56 percent of all subsidies were allocated to woman headed households. We have also made significant progress with regard to ensuring access to basic services, with the latest census results of 2011 showing that over 90% of the population was using an improved drinking water source and over 90% of the population were using flush or chemical toilets. 82% of the population is connected to the main electricity supply.

South Africa has been an active proponent of the Habitat Agenda. We have adopted a Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human

Settlements in 2004, which “promotes the achievement of a non-racial, integrated society through the development of sustainable human settlements and quality housing”. In 2009, President Zuma announced that the Department of Housing would be re-named the Department of Human Settlements and declared “We will proceed from the understanding that human settlement is not just about building houses. It is about transforming our cities and towns and building cohesive, sustainable and caring communities with closer access to work and social amenities, including sports and recreation facilities.”

The National Development Plan for the attainment of South Africa’s Vision 2030 includes a strategy for addressing the persisting human settlements challenges and addressing rapid urbanisation. Preparations for HABITAT III come at the time when we are developing our Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF). The latest census results undeniably show that South Africa is urbanising – with 63% of the population living in urban areas. However, the urban areas still remain highly segregated, with huge concentrations of poverty.

Our municipalities are facing enormous challenges. They struggle to keep pace with the increasing demand for housing provision and basic services of their growing populations.

Insufficient access to well-located land has resulted in people living in situations of informality and resorting to land invasion in search of services and socio-economic opportunities. This has material consequences in terms of health and safety as well as political and legal consequences, including insecure tenure, vulnerability to evictions and the inability to claim rights to full citizenship.

The South African Government has therefore embarked on a strategy for spatial targeting through a Spatial Master Plan, to enable more efficient economic and social investment targeting, resulting in more efficient viable and sustainable urban centres.

Growing infrastructure backlogs and limited resources place huge pressures on sustainable settlement finance.

Urbanisation and the growing informality of urban settlements also put pressures on the natural environment, resulting in disaster risks and environmental challenges.

The intimate linkages between rural and urban areas are very important. While cities are vital to the over-all economic development and growth of the country, they remain largely interdependent and interlinked to rural areas. While rural areas are home to just under a quarter of the population, they remain responsible for food production, essential natural resources like water, and for migrant labour.

South Africa is therefore of the view that the Habitat Agenda of 1996 still remains as valid today as it was then. But we also acknowledge that there needs to be a concrete agenda that speaks to the urban challenges. There are shortcomings that need to be addressed in terms of urban planning, urban governance and urban finance.

In addition, we further believe that access to public transport could be a key driver for the achievement of inclusion, social cohesion and improved access to economic, social, cultural and recreational amenities. Thus public transport and urban mobility should form an anchor point for the New Agenda.

In building on the Habitat Agenda, South Africa wishes to urge a continued focus on addressing the needs of women, youth and vulnerable groups. In this regard we feel the needs of people with disabilities deserve a stronger focus in our New Agenda.

As we approach Habitat III, we look forward to the substantive discussions reflecting on ways to improve the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as well as a renewed global commitment for addressing sustainable human settlements and urban development.