



United Nations Conference Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)

Second session of the Preparatory Committee

Opening Statement

By

Dr. Joan Clos,

Secretary-General of Habitat III

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- Honourable Ministers and Heads of Government Delegations,
- Honourable María de los Ángeles Duarte, Minister of Housing and Urban Development of Ecuador and co-chair of the Preparatory Committee;
- Madame Maryse Gautire, Auditor of the Minister of Sustainable Development of France and co-chair of the Preparatory Committee;
- Distinguished Members of the Bureau of Preparatory Committee,
- Excellencies, Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
- All Mayors and their Delegations,
- Representatives of other Urban Stakeholders,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Members of the Press,
- Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to Nairobi for the Second session of the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III).
2. First of all, I would like to welcome all the **Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations** and all the participants who have come from different parts of the world.
3. Allow me also to congratulate Honourable María de los Ángeles Duarte, Minister of Housing and Urban Development of Ecuador on her election as the Co-Chair of the Preparatory Committee.
4. I would like to sincerely thank the **Co-Chairs and all members of** the Preparatory Committee for their leadership and dedication provided during the last months in close collaboration with the Habitat III Secretariat.

5. I expect this PrepCom to be three days of debates that will certainly make us advance very well in the preparations towards a successful Habitat III Conference.
6. I would like to offer a special welcome all **the Mayors and representatives of Local Authorities** who are present here today. It is motivating to see all of you and your major networks of local and regional governments gathered.
7. A warm welcome goes also to the representatives of non-governmental organizations, civil society, including grassroots organizations, women groups, youth groups, professionals and academia, foundations and private sector. I welcome you all and thank you for your continuous engagement.
8. There are thirty seven side events already running, and several other meetings that will be closely monitored and reported by the Secretariat team in order to capture all relevant inputs.

Excellences, distinguished delegates

9. We meet at a time of unprecedented international dialogue. There are currently very important global debates taking place on the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals, and on how to address the challenge of climate change.
10. Both these debates are highly relevant for the global themes and challenges of our time. They are also a fundamental basis for our discussions on a **New Urban Agenda**, the envisaged outcome of the Habitat III Conference.
11. In this statement, I would like to share with you the main strategic issues that are important as we debate a new vision for urbanization in the twenty-first century.

12. The role of **urbanization in sustainable development** is now clearly recognized. The rapidly increasing urban populations worldwide put the process of urbanization among the most significant global trends of the twenty-first century.
13. But urbanization is not simply a demographic phenomenon. It is a broader force which can help the world to overcome some of its major global challenges such as **sustainable development, climate change** and the **global social agenda**.
14. The positive correlation between urbanization and development has long been established by economic history studies. Throughout history, urbanization has been, and continues to be, an **engine rather than an outcome of development**.
15. Urbanization is a way of life, a process of change from rural to urban ways of living, in spatial, social and economic terms. **Planned urbanization** has been the means by which most modern services, institutions and infrastructures have been brought to the people, wherever they are.
16. Urbanization can be harnessed and steered through policy, planning and regulatory instruments to contribute towards the three dimensions of **sustainable development**, i.e. economic, social and environmental.
17. The contribution of cities to **national economic growth**, and to economic sustainability in general, is important and well understood. Urbanization, if done well, is an effective instrument and driver of rural prosperity as well as general economic development.
18. However, urban planning in both developed and developing countries, have generally in the last 50 years

followed a repetitive and similar model, that we call the **“International Model”**. This model has demonstrated good economic performance, but not addressed the social challenge of equity and cohesion, and has not adequately addressed the global environmental challenge.

19. It has produced sprawling urban areas, many in the form of megacities, hypercities, and large metropolitan regions and urban corridors that are energy inefficient, environmentally unsustainable and, at the end, become **economically inefficient**.
20. In developing countries, rapid urbanization has resulted in uncontrolled peri-urbanization, most of it informal. It is clear that **this model of urbanization is not adequate** for economic and social prosperity, nor is it sustainable.
21. A special mention is needed in the area of **climate change**. We know that cities, mostly in the developed world, contribute up to 70% of the world’s total greenhouse gas emissions. Equally, with increasing urbanization and concentration of large numbers of people, disaster risk is also increasing within towns and cities. New urban models are required in order to effectively address the challenge of climate change and be better prepared for disasters.

Excellences, distinguished delegates;

22. In creating the transformation needed, the New Urban Agenda must address all three pillars of sustainable development. First by promoting the **economic role** of cities in national development and recognizing the economic opportunities that they offer; secondly, paying attention to the basic needs of the millions of people living in **poverty** within towns and cities, including in the urban slums; and finally, addressing global **environmental challenges** such as climate change, unsustainable energy consumption, and the risk of disaster.

23. The first premise is the **positive correlation** between **urbanization and development**. Urbanization can be a powerful tool for transforming production capacities and income levels in developing countries. It can add quite a substantial input to growth of GDP.
24. The second premise is that the **quality and quantity** of **urban output** is highly related to the **quality and characteristics of urbanization**. Good urbanization does not come by chance, but by design. The form and arrangement that a city is given predetermines not only the economic output of the urban area, but most of the critical aspects of urban life.
25. How can we change the existing paradigm? Cities and towns around the world are at different stages of development. In terms of solution, there is no one-size-fits-all.
26. However, based on our experience since Habitat II, there are a set of basic criteria and principles that should be at the heart of every urban framework.
27. One is **legislation**. The outcome quality of the urban settlement is dependent on the set of rules and regulations and its implementability. Laws, institutions and systems of governance shape the operational principles and structures that underpin the process of urbanization. Good urbanization requires the rule of law.
28. A second important element is the reinvigoration of **urban planning and design**. It should be the primary objective of urban planning and design to establish the adequate provision of common goods, particularly the public space. Public space serves as a venue for the people living in the city to meet, interact and resolve differences, contributing to social cohesion and public safety. Public space also provides rights-of-way for infrastructures.

29. The third important element is strengthening **municipal finance**, as the best way to harness urbanization as an endogenous source of development. Municipal finance should realign fiscal authority and ensure revenue sharing, key for investments, maintenance and good management of the city.
30. The success of urbanization in yielding positive outcomes is closely linked to the balanced and adequate implementation of these three elements. Addressing them requires a **strategic and integrated approach** which is systemic and transformative. Above all, this approach must build on the role of urbanization as an engine of prosperity and sustainable development.
31. These actions need to be adapted to different circumstances, as there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution. Good urbanization is always developed in the context of the local economy and political issues. It therefore requires a close **in-situ follow-up** in each case. This fact allows the United Nations a special relationship with Local Authorities worldwide.
32. At the same time, **national governments** have a key responsibility for the end-product of urbanization. Legal and financial frameworks are established at the national level, as well as large infrastructures, and the broad national policies on security, welfare and regional development.
33. In this respect, a **National Urban Policy** is an important tool to leverage the productivity and potential of urban centres for local and national economic development. They help to coordinate the work of different sectors and tiers of government, establish the incentives for more sustainable practices, and provide a basis for the allocation of resources.

Excellences, distinguished delegates;

34. The New Urban Agenda should represent a **paradigm shift** towards a new urbanization approach. This approach should respond better to the challenges of our age, optimizing resources to harness future potentials. This new agenda should be universal, rights-based, integrative, inclusive, equitable, people-centred, and measurable.
35. It should also have the possibility of articulating different scales, from the neighbourhood to the global level, and diverse human settlements, from the **rural village** and rural service centre, through the small and medium-sized town, to the city and megacity.
36. Universality, human rights, equality, integration and data revolution have emerged from the current consultations on the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals as fundamental principles. These principles should also guide the overall direction of the New Urban Agenda.
37. Habitat III will be **the first UN global conference** to be held after the adoption of the post-2015 sustainable development goals. It will largely focus on how to implement the urbanization dimension of sustainable development and, hopefully, a new climate change agreement. The New Urban Agenda must therefore resonate with the spirit of the post-2015 sustainable development, the climate change discussion and the global social agenda.
38. As you may recall, after more than one year of discussion and negotiation, the Open Working Group (OWG) adopted, by acclamation, a proposal on post-2015 sustainable development goals and targets. This proposal includes a goal 11, which is entitled “**Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**”.

39. By including a goal 11 in its proposal, the Open Working Group has recognized that **special attention** is needed on urbanization, in order to ensure a sustainable future.

Excellences, distinguished delegates,

40. I would like to conclude this statement by stressing again the role of urbanization as an engine for prosperity and transformation.

41. Cities and towns, if well-planned and managed, are **sources of sustainable development**. They are the arenas where the battles against climate change and will be won or lost. Planned urbanization is the process by which services and infrastructure is brought to the people, wherever they are. It is the means to achieving poverty reduction, gender equality and social sustainability.

42. It is my hope that the way towards Habitat III will be an opportunity to **deepen the knowledge** on urbanization, particularly the important capacity of urbanization to foster sustainable development.

43. I wish you very successful deliberations.