Remarks

by

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Sustainable Cities Key to Sustainability and Development

Please check against delivery

Mayor of Istanbul and President of UCLG, Kadir Topbas,

Deputy Secretary General, Jan Eliasson,

Executive Director of UN Habitat, Joan Clos

Co-Chair of the Friends of Sustainable Cities,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'd like to begin by making some important acknowledgements of those who made today's meeting possible: UN Habitat; The Group of Friends for Sustainable Cities, which is co-chaired by Sweden and Singapore; and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments for the Post 2015 Development Agenda towards Habitat III.

With negotiations for the post 2015 development agenda just around the corner, your foresight and leadership in convening this event is very much appreciated. It is often noted that while cities have contributed to our challenges in sustainability, they are also key to the solution. This three-day meeting will surely help contribute to upcoming discussions and clarify needs and priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The lure of cities is nearly as old as civilization itself. The sense of possibility and opportunity, the concentration of wealth and creativity, and the hope for a better life have been drawing people to cities throughout the ages. The number of city dwellers is at an all-time high – comprising half of the global population or about 3.5 billion people, by 2050, nearly three out of four of us will live in a city, by choice, necessity or circumstance.

At the same time that cities have drawn people en masse, they have also let many down. 828 million people live in slums and the number is rising. The inequality of cities means that while the privileged thrive, the poor are deprived. Rapid urbanization is exerting pressure on land, fresh water supplies, sewage, the living environment, and public health. Urban congestion has become the hallmark of today's cities, and many are afflicted with smog and pollution. National and local governments are strained and don't have the capacity to address these and other key issues.

Never has it been more imperative to harness our efforts toward the creation of sustainable, livable cities. Effective and advance urban planning, combined with sound governance can lead us to sustainable urban lifestyles, improved patterns of consumption, resource efficiency and healthy prosperity. Such combination of planning and governance

drives cultural, intellectual, educational, and technological achievements and innovations. In the process, new green industries, jobs and technologies can take root and flourish.

We see such innovations already springing up around the world – there are cities with fresh urban green spaces, rooftop agriculture, improved transportation systems, and solar powered heating, cooling and lighting among others. We should be heartened by the burgeoning local level activity and the commitment already thriving in the world.

But as we mark the highest and most rapid rate of urbanization in human history, we need to focus on how to improve these processes and scale them up. With this in mind, let me pose a few questions:

1. How can we make better use of green grid-based energy systems - such as combined heat and power and micro-generation of energy? Or utilize rainwater harvesting to support access to clean water? Or make available efficient waste management technologies?

2. Urban transport systems, the construction of buildings, the development of energy, water, and waste systems, all need to be improved in such a way that they reduce resource and energy consumption and avoid lock-in effects. What are the most

appropriate design strategies and technologies to bring about such improvements?

3. How can we further capitalize on the innovation that springs from residents and workers who are in close proximity, exchanging ideas and opportunities? Or the diverse yet specialized skill-sets offered by research institutions, firms and service providers, who can pilot and scale new technologies in highly networked environments?

4. How can we design sustainable urban policies that are socially inclusive, participatory, and take into account the specific needs of women, youth and vulnerable groups?

Excellencies,

One of the most encouraging aspects of sustainability is that improvements in one sector can easily have positive spill-over effects. I cite as an example, enhancing public transport systems improves the environment by lowering carbon emissions and vehicle congestion. At the same time it reduces inequality by improving access to public services, and helping to relieve pollution. Further, improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists fosters healthier lifestyles and well-being. Studies indicate that children who live close to green spaces are more

resistant to stress; have lower incidence of behavioural disorders, anxiety, and depression; and have a higher measure of self-worth.

All these potential benefits, can be achieved only through effective multi-level governance, including the participation of relevant stakeholders i.e. communities, civil society, the private sector and universities especially their science departments. After all, the jury is still out on the extent to which green infrastructure or any other constructed ecosystem is actually performing the intended functions. This collaboration provides an opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and a thorough understanding of the issues, allowing for a sound basis for developing solutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my sincere wish that the outcomes of this Meeting are distilled into practical solutions to assist policy makers and practitioners with placing urban centres on the path to sustainability and resource efficiency. I have no doubt that you will also make important contributions to the ongoing debate on the post 2015 development agenda, with regard to the role of cities, and specifically to the January meeting of the Open Working Group.

Throughout history, our cities have always been innovation hubs, setting trends and driving progress. As we set the world on a sustainable development course, let us again harness this creative potential to build smarter cities for present and future generations.

Thank you.

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