



Remarks

by

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Vice-President

on behalf of

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

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H.E. Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda,
H.E. Mr. Angelino Garzon, Vice-President of Colombia,
Excellencies,
H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General, United Nations,
H.E. Mr. Vladimir Drobnyak, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council,
Mr. Michael Bloomberg, Former Mayor of New York City and UN Special Envoy for Cities
and Climate Change,
Mr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, it is my pleasure to join you for this first-ever Integration Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which will focus our attention on a topic of mounting importance: sustainable urbanization.

The urbanization process poses both challenges and opportunities - many of which span across all three dimensions of sustainable development - in both developing and developed regions. These range from creating sustainable transportation to providing adequate services to growing populations; from ensuring resilience to extreme weather events to building sustainable infrastructure and housing, to name but a few. With the right policies and approaches, urbanization can be a transformative force that helps address some of the world's major challenges, such as poverty, unemployment and climate change.

With its focus on the three pillars of sustainable development, this Integration Segment can serve as a useful guide for how to ensure we make the most of sustainable urbanization's opportunities. In this regard, allow me to put forward some questions for your consideration.

Foremost, how do we maximize the contribution of urbanization to sustainable economic development? With cities accounting for at least 80% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), they are intricately tied to the challenges of unemployment and poverty. We must make sure that cities and towns function efficiently, making it easier to invest, operate productive activities and thus create more jobs.

The second question is what is the role of urbanization in environmental sustainability? The most significant global environmental challenge of our time is climate change and it has been

estimated that cities and towns, mostly in the developed world, contribute up to 70 per cent of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions. Cities need to both be prepared to deal with climate impacts, while at the same time, minimizing their contributions in light of their concentration of industrial production, construction and energy use in transportation and buildings.

Thirdly, what is the role of urbanization in socially sustainable development?" While poverty has for a long time been concentrated in rural areas, the increasing concentration of the world's population in cities and towns also means that the concentration of poverty is shifting towards urban centres – a process that has been defined as the 'urbanization of poverty'. We have to bear in mind too that close to one billion people in developing countries still live in urban slums. Without improving the conditions of urban slum dwellers, there will be no sustainable development

My final questions are at the heart of this segment: how can we integrate these three areas to ensure maximum contribution to sustainable development? What can and should Governments and the international community do to ensure that this integration is achieved? And how should urbanization be reflected in the forthcoming post-2015 development agenda?

With the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) looking at "Sustainable cities and human settlements" as a standalone focus area, it is clear that these issues are on everyone's mind, and I am looking forward to hearing your views and perspectives.

As we prepare to open a new chapter in development history, we must harness the creative energies and resources of cities. For they will be the fertile ground where our global sustainable development efforts take root.

Thank you.
