



World Chronicle

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“The Challenge of Slums”

The day when most of the world's population will be living in cities is near. Unfortunately, this may also mean that by the year 2030 as many as two billion people could be living in urban slums. What policies are needed to help large segments of humanity – in rich and poor countries alike -- from living in squalor? Are democratic governments less likely to have large slums, as some experts have suggested? And is there a link between criminality – or even terrorist activity – and slums? On this edition of **World Chronicle**, these are some of the questions explored with the help of the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, Anna Tibaijuka.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Pick a human being at random. A thousand years ago, or even 30 years ago, chances are that he or she would be living in a rural area. That is all about to change: urban areas are growing so fast that by the year 2030 they'll account for 60 percent of world's population. Most of that growth is taking place in developing countries. And unless action is taken, most of those people – as many as 2 billion – could be living in slums. Here today to discuss the challenge posed by urban slums is our guest: the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Anna Tibaijuka. Joining us in the studio are Myriam Zaki of Egypt's *Channel 1 Television*, and Ian Williams of *The Nation*.

Mrs. Tibaijuka, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now if we see a really horrible festering slum – we know what it is -- but there must be marginal communities which are not quite slums. How do you define a slum in Habitat?

TIBAIJUKA: Well, a slum is actually a living environment, or a settlement, which could be in the inner city, it could be on the periphery of an urban area, it could be in the suburb, where you do not have adequate shelter in terms of a decent home with, of course, the requisite basic needs – water, sanitation – and all that goes with it. So in the United Nations, under the Habitat Agenda, we have accepted what we call an adequate shelter standard and in a slum this is normally not met.

WILLIAMS: But I think what Michael is referring to – but my home city of Liverpool was famous for having slums and a lot of my relatives lived in them, but they had running water, they had sewerage, they had paved roads and they had sort of all the basic services so these were luxury homes for Calcutta say, or for Nairobi. But so is there a relative definition of a slum? Can a place be a slum in one country and a desirable middle class residence in another?

TIBAIJUKA: Of course, there's always a continuum. There could always be differences. After all, well-being is always a relative issue. But when we talk of slum conditions we are talking of living environments which simply do not have basic needs. As I said, water and sanitation would be in place. The basic services which really define a

decent standard of living are not in place. It is not necessarily luxury. Of course, human beings being what they are some people can say that, well, my neighbourhood is not as affluent as the next one so, you know, this could be maybe, in a parochial sense, be defined not as the best neighbourhood. But we're not talking about that. We are talking about squalid living conditions where people's lives and health are jeopardized by lack of basic services.

ZAKI: I believe that in slum areas people are ingenious in creating solutions for their problems; through the United Nations, do you find ways of involving these people in developing strategies to actually make their lives better?

TIBAIJUKA: Indeed, the slum dwellers themselves are hard working people. By definition, the majority of them are survivors. Most of them are newly arrived from the countryside seeking a better life and this is the place where really survival strategies come to the fore. So you have to – you just can't sit there doing nothing so you find people innovating all sorts of – taking all sorts of initiatives to be able to eke out a livelihood, to be able to survive. So there is a lot of imagination and a lot of hard work, a lot of decency and integrity in slums. But let us face it, the environment is very, very restrictive so you find that people do so much to achieve solidarity. And that's where the public policy comes in, that's where the United Nations would like to declare a partnership with these people and assist them to improve their living environment.

WILLIAMS: It's occurred to me that in another context, I think it was the Indian economist, Amartya Sen, who said that you couldn't have a famine with democracy. Do you think it's possible to have long-term slum areas in a democracy? Because those people have the votes. They have a means of affecting themselves. Is there any correlation that you can see between political conditions and slums?

TIBAIJUKA: Indeed, I recall that Professor Sen made it actually in the context of World Habitat Day last year where he was giving a lecture on poverty, on urban poverty in particular. It is true that if you have democratic governance, if you have good governance, which means you have equity, you have distribution, you have values which are really guiding the way you conduct your business, that you will reduce the level of deprivation that we see in slums. And within the framework of our work in the United Nations we are pushing very much the notion of good urban governance and also, of course, security of tenure. I think that the reality now with three billion people at the moment already living in cities and one billion of these living in slums, that we need to broker a partnership with these people. Which means instead of discouraging slums dwellers, you know, razing down their shacks, evicting them arbitrarily, we have to encourage these people because

these people are decent people, hard-working people the majority of them, and the solution of really improving their environment lies with them. So, indeed I would submit that Professor Sen is very much right that if you have a democracy, which means you have values which are promoting the worth of everyone, then you will try to assist them, particularly the women and the children in the vulnerable groups.

LITTLEJOHNS: You in Habitat have produced this report, "The Challenge of Slums". It's quite a hefty tome. Could you tell us briefly what it's about?

TIBAIJUKA: This report is actually our flagship report on the subject. Like all UN agencies we produced these reports for the General Assembly. This particular one is now looking at the state of our cities and towns. It's a global report on human settlements 2003 focusing on the challenge of slums, and we have...

LITTLEJOHNS: This is the current theme?

TIBAIJUKA: It's a current theme of this particular report. You know, every two years this report comes out from the United Nations, produced by UN Habitat, and this year it is making a contribution to our debate and work on the Millennium Development Goals and Target 7 of the Millennium Development Goals, Goal 7, Target 11, is about slum upgrading. And so in the Millennium Declaration, the United Nations agencies were painfully aware of the realities of our times and the Millennium, the world leaders in the Millennium Declaration said that cities should be without slums. So that idea was endorsed by the Millennium Declaration and our job is now to translate that into reality and this book, by documenting the reality of slum life in different parts of the world, from the very rich to the very poor, it just shows that we all have work to do at the local level, at the national level, but also at the international level. For example, even in the high-income countries, you have about 6% of the people living in what we call slum-like conditions -- you were talking about the Liverpool area. You know, there are depressed neighbourhoods where we say that people could be in a rich country but living under slum-like conditions.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, we have slums in New York, of course.

TIBAIJUKA: We do have slums. Actually that is true. You could have slum-like conditions because you see neighbourhoods can deteriorate for many reasons. The main reason behind the growth of slums in the developing countries is actually rural/urban migration but that is not all. There is also the problem of inequality, the problem of policies, the problem of apathy, you know, from the planners. You know, people trying to pretend that the slums don't exist. But this report is all they are trying to document that slums are

there and that they really shouldn't be there. But they won't go away by decree. We just have to make the right investments.

ZAKI: Do you think that the focus should be in the beginning at developing rural areas from a socio-economic standpoint or should we address the issues in the slums straight away?

TIBAIJUKA: Well, it is a question of a balanced development policy because as I said the main source of immigrants into the slums, of the developing world at least, this one billion people that I am talking about, the majority of them in the Asian countries where you have 60%, or about 550 million people, newly arrived from the countryside. And now the migration of people from the rural areas to the urban areas is something that comes with economic development and structural transformation. In principle, it's a good thing because as agriculture advances -- you don't need so many hands on the farm -- these people going to the secondary and tertiary sectors. But it is also true that if it comes too fast, too quickly, then the newly arrived will not immediately find a decent neighbourhood, a job which they can do; sometimes they come without the requisite skills. But also you have the natural growth of population in the slums. They have their own momentum. This is places, as I said, where you don't find the basic services, the basic needs, which means also family planning services will not have been placed so fertility rates are still very high despite the squalor in which they find their existence. I would like to say that first of all to dispel the belief that you can stop urbanization. You cannot stop urbanization because people move in search of a better life and we know cities, these are the centres of economic growth, affluence, politics. All these take place in cities and the rural people also want to be part of that so it's good if they can come provided they'll find a livelihood. So this report is emphasizing very much that if we are going to have decent shelter we also need a decent income, livelihood, so the challenge is employment, decent livelihoods for the urban dwellers.

WILLIAMS: I'd just like to reinforce what Michael was saying before. I think within a kilometre of this building you will find homeless people in New York who would love the chance to live in a slum because it beats the city streets (laughter). But that aside, the United Nations Development Programme started, with its Human Development Index, the whole idea of an index which in a sense was naming and shaming countries for their records. I haven't had a chance to check properly yet but do you have a sort of slum index or a housing index where you can rank countries upon how are they doing in housing their population and how they're failing?

TIBAIJUKA: Indeed. UN-Habitat is now working on what we called a city development Index. Where our colleagues in the UNDP have global national statistics we

deal with settlements, which means we are dealing with cities. So the idea is to say that the nation is a very good indicator but it's still too big so let us go to the actual localities, the city; which city is doing better than the other. In this way we'll find the variations. So a city development index is something which will bring in what we call – whether the city is inclusive and an inclusive city is one where really every citizen feels part and parcel of that particular environment, of that particular locality. And you talked about homeless people for example. We do make a difference between social homelessness and economic homelessness. You know, there are people who are homeless because they are social drop-outs for different reasons -- drug abuse or others – but there are also people who are actually economic homeless. They simply can't find a place to live.

LITTLEJOHNS: We have both kinds in New York.

TIBAIJUKA: I can imagine it's so. You will normally find them but I would like to submit though that most of the people, like people living in slums, as I said these are people who actually determined, that's why they are moving from where they were in the first place. You know, there are people on the march looking for a better life who normally are very responsive to public policy and investments and therefore you could actually get a lot by investing not necessarily so much.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is the Executive Director of UN- Habitat, Anna Tibaijuka.

Let's go to our report now. It's an excerpt from a documentary in which young people discuss the cities they lived in. We'll be hearing from Bruno, an adolescent in Fortealeza, Brazil, who is witnessing massive migration into his city, here it is.

BRUNO: These poor migrants! They probably thought they'd have a better life here but it's a nightmare. The people have nowhere else to go. Most of them are unskilled, so it's hard for them to find work in the big city. They end up living in cardboard houses, in favelas. That's what we call the slums in Brazil. There are about 400 favelas in Fortealeza. There is no water, no sewerage system, no nothing. It's terrible. And...can you believe it? One-third of all the people of Fortealeza lives this way.

BRUNO: Marwa, your story really opened my eyes. I wonder what my city is doing for all these poor people.

BRUNO: Mr. Mayor, how big is the housing problem in Fortealeza?

MAYOR: The housing shortage is large in Fortealeza. It's estimated at about 120,000 houses. This shortage is mainly caused by the rural exodus, which is really big.

This is the result of the cyclical droughts in the interior of this state. Each year, huge numbers of people migrate towards Fortaleza, exerting enormous pressure on housing needs and other essential services.

BRUNO: Is it true that 45 families arrive in Fortaleza every day?

MAYOR: Yes. During the droughts, 45 to 50 families arrive each day from the countryside. They escape the harsh conditions of the interior. When they arrive the first thing they need – besides food obviously – is a place to live. A roof over their heads.

BRUNO: The mayor told me that just like in Lebanon, we have a lot of construction going on. Two voluntary organizations, one Brazilian and one French, have started a project to improve the life in the favelas.

What they did was to bring the people who need housing together with the municipality. You see, the city government gives materials and money, the people from the favelas do the work, building their own houses themselves. There's a word for that in Brazil, 'mutirao'.

It means working together as a group. Joining together so you have more power than you'd have as an individual, and doing the construction as a team. And the faster you work, the faster you get your house.

As you see in the map of Fortaleza, projects like these are popping up all over the place. They will soon transform the city and the day will come where there will be no more favelas here.

These houses may look simple, but they mean a lot to these people. After all, they built their own homes. And now they can get grants to finish them off or add extra rooms.

(MUSIC)

BRUNO: Yves Cabanes has participated in housing programmes all over the world. He works at the voluntary organization, Gret Urbano. They've helped bring the municipality and the people together. I asked him what happens to the people after they get their houses?

YVES: We have to consider that housing is a basic and immediate need. But housing is also a means to mobilize the community. People can be trained to become electricians, bricklayers and so on. This is done in order to diversify people's sources of income. To us, housing without employment does not make sense.

(MUSIC)

BRUNO: While people build their houses, they can also learn a trade. Others are shown how to start small businesses.

(MUSIC)

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Tibaijuka, the footage we've just seen is of quite a success story and in fact I believe that the project received a Habitat Award. Is this a very isolated case or do you have perhaps several in various parts of the world? Successes I mean.

TIBAIJUKA: Indeed this is a very good example of what we call in situ slum upgrading where we are really encouraging the city managers to come to terms with the reality that people in some places have already come in too quickly and these people are not about to vanish so the best way is to galvanize the energies of those people, as we have seen in this particular example where people are actually putting up their own houses. As I pointed out before, these are normally determined people, hard-working people who want to improve their situation. They are not looking for handouts from anybody. All they need is really encouragement, so in this particular example where the city provided land, you have seen the results. Actually, the gentleman in the picture, Yves Cabanes, is my staff member. He is working for the Habitat programme in Latin America so I was happy to see that an independent camera was able to capture him at work. So it's very encouraging but it also shows what we are doing in the different parts of the world. So the policy prescriptions we are making to suit managers is that take the urban poor, the newly arrived, as an asset instead of having a negative attitude, thinking these are your problem. They actually could be a solution. This book, "The Challenge of Slums", also shows that city economies, a good number of city economies, urban economies depend on the dynamic, the kind of income being generated in these slum settlements. So it is better that the world not be greedy but to share with everybody because in the final analysis, as average incomes rise, everybody will be better off.

ZAKI: Success stories are wonderful but some other stories are not yet very successful and my worry is that in these very deprived areas where people are disenfranchised when they don't have their basic needs met, they could be actually breeding grounds for any opportunists really to gain support or to – how much are donor agencies aware of this problem? How urgent is their need to fight that problem?

TIBAIJUKA: First of all, let me say that when it comes to in situ slum upgrading, improving the situation of slum dwellers, we have no story where this has failed. What normally fails is the unwillingness of those who are better off to assist these people so I would like to say that the response has been wonderful, wherever it has been tried. I have just come from Egypt, your own country, where I was visiting some of the slum upgrading projects which have been funded by a number of actors, including the First Lady of Egypt,

Madame Susan Mubarak. And I was encouraged to see the kind of response in the various sites and the neighbourhoods where you have all these dumps to see the kind of energy, the kind of enthusiasm and the improvements which have been made with a considerably limited amount of investments. As I said, the biggest asset we have here is the people themselves. After all, let us face it, in many cities of the developing world 60% of the people live in slum conditions so there is no town hall which is going to pretend to give a house, a free house to all these people. These people need to be empowered economically so we are advocating therefore a legal, an enabling legal framework in which these people can improve their situation. We are trying to discourage the exploitation of the poor in slums. We are trying to limit, for example, the exploitation of these people by criminal elements in society which can, for example, recruit the youths into unsocial behaviour such as terrorism, but it is wrong to think that the poor are criminals. In fact, the crime rates in these neighbourhoods are normally low compared to the rest of the town because you have greater social control. So basically the main message is this is an asset, this is reality, it won't be going away, so let us make the best out of it.

WILLIAMS: I want to tempt you into some heresy in this neo-liberal world of ours. You mentioned some of your success stories in your report of places like Singapore where almost all of the housing was government or municipally built. Certainly, the great British and American triumphs of slum clearances were done by providing municipal housing; a lot of government money was put in to that. Do you think that the current mantra is that the free market will solve all problems? Do you think that left to its own devices that the free market is going to provide housing for these people or do you see a role for municipal and government intervention?

TIBAIJUKA: I think economic theory is also very clear on this. There is no place since Keynes -- and we know this great economist -- where you know the market solved problems like this without regulation. So definitely the market has a very important role to play but the issue is whether we have an appropriate and effective regulatory framework within which the market can provide housing. I will give you an example. My agency, UN-Habitat, is actually located in Nairobi, Kenya. This is a city of about three million -- Nairobi -- where 60% of the people live in unplanned neighbourhoods and they only owned 5% of the land. So that gives you a measure of inequality, which means 60% of the town population is cramped into only 5% of the residential land. Now, 80% of these people are tenants actually so there you have the private sector, the market, providing housing but the profit margins -- the rents are so high that the profit margins are simply obscene. In real estate investment you normally take 10 to 14 years before you should get your money back but in

the Nairobi slums it takes only nine months. So definitely you can see that there is a lot of vested interest, there is a lot of profiteering and there are many people who don't like the slums to go away. Simply, they would like to sit on that profit. That's where the public policy comes in to sort of improve the situation.

ZAKI: Three billion people living under slum conditions by 2030, half of them are women. What do you do to empower these women?

TIBAIJUKA: Absolutely. In fact the majority of the slum dwellers are women and the children they support, struggling on their own, and under our good urban governance campaign we are really encouraging what we called gender equity. That a settlement will not – a city cannot be inclusive unless also you hear the other voice, particularly for women, because normally – now you and I, we are both women on this panel. Normally we are told that we should remain in the home and we might argue that then for God's sake there should be a home where we can remain. This is not always the case either so definitely the question of giving women land rights, property rights, inheritance rights, education and other skills to be able to compete, is very important.

LITTLEJOHNS: There's a tendency to throw money at problems and hope that they'll be resolved that way. If you had to, if you approach them that way how much money would you think would be necessary to really crack this crisis?

TIBAIJUKA: I would like to say that first of all, money without right policies will not take us very far just to start but now in the end of course we need to put in infrastructure, basic infrastructure. We do need to put in water, sanitation, electricity, the basic services. The amount of money we need will differ from place to place, also the kind of technology you will use. For example, we have just seen in this picture where you can have simple housing.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Tibaijuka, that's all the time we have, thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Anna Tibaijuka. She was interviewed by Miriam Zaki, of Egypt's *Channel 1 Television* and Ian Williams of *The Nation*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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