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**Opening Statement by H.E. Mr. Léo Mérorès, Permanent Representative of Haiti to the United Nations  
and President of the Economic and Social Council**

**Forum on Sustainable Urbanization in the Information Age  
23 April 2008**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Forum on Sustainable Urbanization in the Information Age. This event is an initiative of many partners from within and outside the UN system. They have brought together a diverse group to generate a vibrant dialogue and share their varied perspectives. I am pleased to join you.

One of the principle pursuits of the United Nations is to promote economic and social advancement of all peoples, and the organ which leads this effort is the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Working not just for present generations but also the future, the Council advocates a truly sustainable kind of development – a development that reflects a careful balance of economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

The key mechanism through which it does so is the Council's Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), a high-level forum on sustainable development. This functional commission was created to ensure effective follow-up of the Earth Summit, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. Its functions have since expanded so that it may respond to new needs. The CSD will hold its next annual session in less than two weeks.

ECOSOC itself will discuss progress made towards sustainable development during the 2008 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), to be held in New York in July during the Council's Substantive Session. Selected as this year's Review theme, sustainable development is a broad subject, but today's topic – sustainable urbanization – will be a significant component of the Review. Your meeting will surely provide interesting input to the Council's deliberations.

Other events leading up the Review are also contributing to the AMR preparations, including a six-week e-discussion co-organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and UNDP, and a global preparatory event held at headquarters in March of this year. Eight countries – four developed and four developing – are in the process of holding national consultations to review their progress towards the internationally agreed development goals -- including goals on sustainable development -- which they will present to the Council during the AMR National Voluntary Presentations.

Also, in June, a regional AMR preparatory meeting on the theme of sustainable urbanization is being hosted by the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain in Manama. There, participants from the Western Asia

region are expected to discuss issues related to those on our agenda today, including urban infrastructure and access to services, green architecture, and financing (including through Islamic banking) and technology transfer for sustainable development. The event will also feature presentations by governments, civil society and the private sector of best practices, partnerships and new initiatives to ensure sustainable urbanization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As many other speakers will emphasize today, the trend toward urbanization is inexorable and increasingly swift. As you may know, in 2008, for the first time in history, more than half the world's population is living in urban areas. And over the next few decades there will be unprecedented scale of urban growth in the developing world.

Rather than fear the shift from rural to urban, we have an opportunity to leverage it to ensure sustainable development. What we need is *sustainable urbanization*. Sustainable urbanisation is a multi-dimensional process that requires social, economic and political-institutional sustainability, *as well as* environmental sustainability.

The key actors necessary to achieve sustainable development are local authorities endowed with adequate powers, resources, and operational capacity, combined with empowered communities and other local partners from civil society and the private sector.

We can look forward to this meeting examining policies and actions that might provide new, more effective responses to poverty, social injustice, environmental degradation and other challenges as humans increasingly congregate in urban agglomerations. In Sessions 1, 3 and 4, we will learn about the experiences of cities around the world, including this one – New York City. In Session 2, we will examine how the private sector and civil society can contribute to achieving sustainable urbanization. There should be no doubt that we have much to learn from one another.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can wait no longer. We must prepare for the future today. We must come to terms with rapid urbanisation and urban growth. We must work together to ensure the effective management of these processes in order to achieve functional, resilient and responsive human settlements.

Let this gathering be another step toward such efforts.

I wish you all the best for a productive meeting.