

UN **HABITAT** FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

26th Meeting of the UNEP Governing Council

Address to the Opening of the High Level Segment

By Dr. Joan Clos

Executive Director of UN-HABITAT

Your Excellency Mr. Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya,

President of the UNEP Governing Council,

Your Excellencies,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

My Colleague, Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP,

Other UN Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure and a privilege for me to be with you today to address the 26th session of the Governing Council of UNEP in my capacity as the Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

I must say I was delighted with the level of cooperation and cordial relations that I found between UNEP and UN-Habitat when I arrived in Nairobi four months ago. The co-location in Nairobi of these two United Nations programmes dealing with the natural environment and the built environment is evidence of the wisdom and foresight of our founders. On behalf of UN-Habitat, I welcome you all to this United Nations Headquarters in Africa.

Excellencies,

The effects of urbanization and climate change are converging in dangerous ways that seriously threaten the world's environmental, economic and social stability. Indeed, rapid urbanization and climate change are among the most dominant global forces that the world will have to deal with in this new century.

Way back in 1976, the Habitat Conference Plan of Action expected that urban expansion, fuelled by population growth and rural-to-urban migration, would be "... the most common and universal development challenge." The Plan also noted that urban expansion could take the form of urban sprawl, thus becoming "... costly, wasteful and ecologically destructive".

Later, at the Rio Summit in 1992, Chapter 7 of Agenda 21 explicitly addressed the issue and introduced the concept of **sustainable human settlements** for the first time. It stated that "... urbanization, if properly managed..." offered "... unique opportunities for the supply of sustainable environmental infrastructure through adequate pricing policies ...and access mechanisms that are economically and environmentally sound".

At the Habitat II Conference in 1996, the international community underscored in the Habitat Agenda the need for new approaches to planning and managing rapid urban growth and human settlements. This and other debates advanced the notion of **sustainable urbanization** to help unpack the complex processes of urbanization and the relationship between the urban and the natural environments.

Today, climate change and rapid urbanization have given sustainable development a new impetus and sense of urgency. As we draw closer to Rio + 20, the notion of the **green economy** has entered the sustainable development debate. Already, Governments and cities all over the world are seeking green pathways to economic growth in order to address environmental threats, especially climate change, while at the same time creating jobs.

Distinguished delegates,

I am glad to inform you that, within UN-Habitat, we are vigorously responding to these global trends. One of our top programme priorities at present is promoting what we call **new urban planning**. In recent years, there has been a realization that urban planning in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, is not equipped to deal with current urban challenges.

In promoting new urban planning, UN-Habitat has turned its focus to prevention of urban sprawl and minimization of the demand for mobility. Climate change mitigation and adaptation at the urban level is another top priority. We are also promoting slum prevention and upgrading. And we are promoting improved access to basic urban services, including sustainable transport, energy, water and sanitation.

Many cities in developing countries are not able to plan in advance of the problems of rapid urban growth, mainly because of resource constraints. They are also not able to plan at the scale of the challenges. The new approach that we are promoting emphasises planning in advance, and at the scale required to address existing problems. It is also strategic, and involves planning in phases.

Your Excellency,

When I arrived at UN-Habitat, I was glad to find out that Nairobi is one of the cities in Africa that is already in the process of adopting this new approach to planning, through its **Nairobi Metro 2030 Strategy**. UN-Habitat has made some initial inputs to this Strategy and will follow its implementation with interest.

Further areas of emphasis within our current programmatic work include strengthening of local institutions, governance and legislation. We are also promoting the economic role of cities. Green growth, creation of jobs and delivery of basic urban services all require robust, effective and efficient local authorities.

It is now recognized that many of the mitigation and adaptation measures necessary to deal with climate change will have to be implemented at the local level. Some cities are already in the process of implementing such measures, but many are yet to start. So the work ahead of us in building the capacity of cities to address climate change is immense.

A few years ago, UN-Habitat created the **Urban Environment and Planning Branch**, as part of its response to emerging global challenges. The branch has recently launched the

Cities and Climate Change Initiative, which has already started working with selected cities in all continents of the developing world, including Kampala (in Uganda), Maputo (in Mozambique), Sorsogon (in the Philippines) and Esmeralda (in Ecuador). The aim of the initiative is to strengthen the climate change mitigation and adaptation capacity of these cities.

I am also glad to inform you that UN-Habitat has just completed its **2011 Global Report on Human Settlements**, titled *Cities and Climate Change*. This report identifies promising mitigation and adaptation measures that are supportive of more sustainable and resilient urban development paths. It will be launched during the twenty-third session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council in early April this year.

Distinguished delegates,

I am happy to say that in all these efforts, UN-Habitat has benefited from the willing cooperation and support of UNEP. Our current Partnership Framework for the period 2008–2013 has pushed this cooperation to new heights. One of the aims of the Partnership is to strengthen the capacity of cities to assess and prioritize local environmental concerns. Another aim is to strengthen the capacity of cities to participate effectively in national and global environmental debates, especially in the area of climate change.

The overall theme of the current work plan under the Partnership Framework is “Cities and Climate Change”. In this context, we are jointly developing inventories of urban greenhouse gas emissions. We are also assessing urban vulnerability to climate change impacts. And we are developing innovative adaptation and mitigation mechanisms at the city level, especially in the building and transport sectors.

Distinguished Delegates,

In closing, allow me to welcome all of you again to this UN Headquarters in Africa. I wish you all a most successful Governing Council.

Many of the issues that you will be discussing and deciding on in this session are of immediate relevance to the collaboration between UN-Habitat and UNEP. So I very much look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.