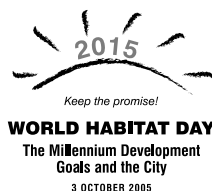




UN-HABITAT



“EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 3 OCTOBER, 2005”

The Executive Director’s Message World Habitat Day

The United Nations has designated the first Monday of October each year as World Habitat Day to reflect on the state of human settlements, especially the living conditions of the urban poor and their basic right to adequate shelter.

The theme of World Habitat Day this year is *The Millennium Development Goals and the City*. If we can achieve the goals in our towns and cities, the impact will be enormous, especially in the burgeoning slums and informal settlements of the developing world. Already, almost half the global population lives in urban areas. And nearly a third of them, about 1 billion people, live in the unhealthy deprivation of slums. Trends show that 90 per cent of global population increase in years to come will be in the cities Africa, Asia and Latin America, where large majorities live in slums, with little access to water, sanitation and other basic services. Cities, therefore, provide an important platform for achieving the Goals.

The goals and their targets are aimed at eradicating poverty, environmental sustainability, achieving universal primary education, empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, fighting AIDS, malaria and other diseases – all features of slum life. Slum upgrading and slum prevention are, therefore, critical to attaining the goals. People in slums are crying out for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

Goal 7, Target 11 commits world leaders to achieving a “*significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.*” But UN-HABITAT considers this far too modest. It covers only a fraction – just 10% – of the world’s slum dwellers. Since it was set in 2000, the global slum population has already grown by 200 million people. If current trends continue, by the 2020 target deadline, the number of slum dwellers will have reached 1.6 billion. Furthermore, individual countries have no way of determining their share of the 100 million people involved. This dictates a much broader and more ambitious approach to achieve the “Cities without Slums” target of the Millennium Declaration adopted by world leaders in September 2000.

We must understand that there will always be a continual flow of poor people into urban areas. Their considerable contribution to the economy is rarely matched by their access to services. These services require a substantial increase in pro-poor investment.

UN-HABITAT’s Slum Upgrading Facility is a new programme to unlock capital for pro-poor investment. It promotes and coordinates partnerships to mobilise domestic and international funding for affordable low-income housing and urban infrastructure in the developing world. The quest for funding urban poverty reduction is also highlighted in our new *Global Report on Human Settlements 2005 on Financing Urban Shelter*. The report analyses the impact of current shelter financing systems on low-income households. By identifying the financing mechanisms that work

for the poor, this report will help governments at the central and local levels, as well as non-governmental and international organizations reduce urban poverty.

UN-HABITAT is launching the global celebration of World Habitat Day in Jakarta to remind the world that countless thousands of homes were destroyed last December by the tsunami killer wave that so devastated Indonesia's Banda Aceh coastline and other Indian Ocean countries.

To date, UN-HABITAT and UNDP have jointly mobilized more than 20 million dollars for shelter and community rehabilitation in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Solutions to land tenure and relocation are central to long term recovery in these countries. UN-HABITAT remains committed to seeing this recovery through.

As we come together like never before for the tsunami victims, so must we join hands and forces in making urban poverty history. We have to confront the "soft tsunamis" of our world, such as HIV/AIDS, hunger and waterborne diseases that kill thousands of victims. We must keep the Millennium promise and give all our support to the new global partnership for development – the eighth goal – between rich and poor countries.