



“Rapid urbanisation is fast becoming one of the major challenges facing the international community, and World Urban Forum offers an opportunity to discuss both the problems and the possibilities of the phenomenon. In a world beset by conflict and intolerance, the theme of the second World Urban Forum – “Cities: Crossroads of culture, inclusiveness and integration” – could not be more relevant. It is critical the world’s cities, now home to a majority of the world’s population, are safe places where all people can benefit from urban development”.

Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Invitation by the Executive Director

Our greatest cities create joy through diversity. They are meeting places for cultures – places, large or small, that encourage different peoples to come together for trade, work, and intellectual exchange. This is why the theme of the Second World Urban Forum is **Cities: Crossroads of Cultures, inclusiveness and integration?**

This theme is posed as a question. In these difficult times, how often is civil conflict caused by misunderstandings between peoples who live in the same city, peoples with different beliefs and histories? When there is prejudice and violence of group against group, how often is it the result of using cultural or class difference as a basis for exclusion?

There is no more important task facing a globalising world than to prepare us for living in a multi-cultural society. As the barriers to travel are removed, citizens come face-to-face with their own fears and ignorance. These are almost always baseless. Those with tolerance find that their own lives are enriched by the cultures of others.

Finding ways to live together is what cities are all about, and UN-HABITAT, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, takes pride in supporting and learning from a World Urban Forum that shares this goal. The World Urban Forum is an informal partners’ forum that brings together governments, local authorities, civil society, NGOs, researchers, youth and all those who champion the city.

By staging the Universal Forum of Cultures, Barcelona, the seat of a rich Catalonian culture, has shown the world that it is committed to cultural diversity. And by integrating the World Urban Forum into the Universal Forum of Cultures, Barcelona offers the cities and citizens of the world a venue for learning – about cultural inclusion and cultural integration.

With this short message, I invite everyone to join us in Barcelona, for the Second World Urban Forum – a global crossroads of cities and cultures.

The World Urban Forum is a key UN event on the international calendar designed to help highlight the problems and possibilities of cities. With 50% of the world's population already living in urban areas, and the figure set to increase within the next 50 years, to two thirds of humanity, the Forum is intended to help the world community meet one of the main challenges of the new Millennium – Urbanization.

Today, despite the many benefits of globalisation, we are living through a period when international conflicts are being played out on every street corner. At the same time, many cities suffer from an urban historical process that segregates ethnic minorities and excludes the poor. Slums are already home to 1 billion people and, over the next 30 years, that figure could double. This is why, the theme of the second World Urban Forum is *Cities: Crossroads of cultures, inclusiveness and integration?*

The First World Urban Forum: Designated by the UN General Assembly as an informal advisory body to governments and all other Habitat Agenda partners, the World Urban Forum is a biennial event. The first ever, World Urban Forum, was held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2002, and was attended by over a thousand delegates. This informal gathering was an exciting opportunity for representatives of governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, urban professionals and academics to catch up with the latest trends in urban planning.

Dialogue and Debate: The World Urban Forum centres around **dialogues**. The aim is to provide an open forum for debate and discussion for everyone from Government officials and Mayors to slum dwellers. Simply stated, the World Urban Forum is a think tank that does away with the formal rules of procedure which usually govern official UN meetings. At this World Urban Forum there will be nine dialogues that are divided into two distinct clusters. Dialogue 1 that focuses on partnerships for improving urban governance and Dialogue Two that focuses on thematic issues of concern to cities.