

UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Programme des Nations Unies pour les établissements humains - Programa de las Naciones Unidas para los Asentamientos Humanos

Statement by Dr. Joan Clos,
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Director of UN-HABITAT
on the occasion of
International Youth Day
12 August 2011

We mark the annual International Youth Day at a time of sadness for the tragic murders of youth leaders in Norway, but with the hope that more young people around the world will carry the torch for freedom, democracy and good governance. Our young generations are the future, and we need all their vitality, creativity and optimism.

In a world where more than half the population lives in towns cities, and where the majority are young people, we need to ensure safe, wealthy, sustainable and well-planned cities for all. And at a time of economic downturn we need to work harder than ever.

The impact of the downturn is heavier still on the millions who languish in poverty in slums and inner city neighbourhoods around the world. This means that our cities must be places of opportunities for young people.

In expressing my heartfelt support for this year's International Youth Day theme, *Change our world*, it is appropriate to highlight UN-HABITAT's youth empowerment programme. It encourages young people to help build better communities by providing them with the means for self-improvement and job skills.

Thanks to the generous backing of the Government of Norway, UN-HABITAT's Urban Youth Fund launched in 2009, has supported many excellent youth-led projects around the world. Out of 5,700 applications received this year, today we will announce the shortlist of winning projects selected by the judges as beneficiaries of the fund.

All of them are examples of the creative solutions we need – ideas brought to us by young people.

It is through programmes such as the UN-HABITAT Urban Youth Fund that young women and men can bring their ideas and partner with us to create better cities and better prospects.

We at UN-HABITAT recognize the importance of promoting the empowerment and participation of young people in efforts towards changing our urban environments through entrepreneurship training, leadership training, construction skills development, disaster and risk management and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Another initiative, of our youth work was the very successful outcome of our first ever African Youth Assembly in Abuja, Nigeria this year, thanks to the support of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Norway. Its proposals will now be incorporated into the agenda of the World Urban Youth Assembly at next year's sixth session of UN-HABITAT's World Urban Forum in Naples, Italy.

Together, in partnership with young people, we can achieve sustainable urban development through collective local action for the attainment of global goals.

This requires turning innovative ideas into action. I am confident that young people can and will rise to this challenge.