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Forum on China and Africa Local Government Cooperation

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When I was born more than half a century ago in my little hometown of Meckhe in Senegal, most people in my country was living in rural areas. At the time, the urban population in Senegal accounted for about 17percent of the total population.

After completing my studies in the Dakar School of Economics, I graduated from Laval University, Canada, before pursuing post graduate education at the City University of New York in the mid 1980's. I found life in The Big Apple, the City of New York to be very fascinating. Also exciting was the urban life in North America, when compared to Senegal, my home country.

From the position of Director City planning, of the city of Dakar, I Joined UNCHS (Habitat) as Chief Technical Adviser-CTA and International Human Settlements Adviser to the Government of Haiti in 1991. I engaged with pride and committed myself to the sustainable development agenda. In the course of the last 20 years in the United Nations, when I managed and coordinated national, regional and global projects and programmes in Africa, Arab States and in the Caribbean regions, I pursued and dreamed of better cities. The pursuit and dream of better cities is the corner stone of the forum on China and Africa Local Government Cooperation that we are opening today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear participants,

Africa is the least urbanized region in the world but at the same time, it is the most rapidly urbanizing continent in the world. With its current population of over 400 million people, Africa will enter its urban age in 2030 with 759 million people – and half of its total population living in cities. It is projected that the urbanization rate of Africa will reach 62 percent by 2050, with an urban population of more than 1.2 billion. This is both a challenge and opportunity.

In this regard, the trends call for more radical development policies, political will ,better urban governance, sound urban environmental planning and actions that will help harness the huge potential of urbanization while mitigating some of the expected urban challenges that the region will be facing in the coming years – ranging from urban poverty manifested partly by rapid growth of slums, secure and efficient public transport, urban disaster preparedness and security, land and public space, lack of affordable housing to the provision of a reliable water and sanitation systems.

But amidst all the challenges, Africa's future looks brighter; with the African democratic growth, good governance and the rule of law, steady social and economic development and above all emerging strong local authorities ready to drive the urban agenda.

When we turn our attention to China, we will find that China is also urbanizing rapidly. In 2011, more than half of the Chinese people lived in cities, a historic change in China's demographic structure.

The cities are now engines of the economic development of China. They have become not only consumers of imported commodities but also producers and manufactures of goods for worldwide export. The industrial sectors have absorbed a large number of rural immigrants, playing the important role of increasing income and improving the lives of both urban and rural population.

Within the consistent and clear urban development strategies, policies, and plans, urban infrastructures have been developed to provide easier access to housing, urban basic services that interface with the daily urban livelihood.

However, cities in China face many challenges for the sustainable urban development in their rapidly industrialization and urbanization processes, such as increasing income gaps between cities and rural areas, growing urban population and limited employment opportunities, overgrowing congestion of large metropolitan areas, high energy consumption that depend on non-renewable natural resources, and serious industrial pollution and environmental threat.

The similarity of rapid urbanization between Arica and China provides a basis for cooperation, as are riding in the same boat towards the same destination: sustainable urban development.

The common challenges faced by the African and Chinese cities can be turned into opportunities if we pull our efforts together by sharing our good practices and lessons learned, supporting each other within our resources and capacities. The upcoming global event in Naples during the 6th World Urban Forum and later in Dakar Senegal for the 6th Africities Summit in December will provide strong cooperation opportunities for China and Africa local governments to set partnership for the future.

As concluded at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Brazil in June 2012, "if they are well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies".

Ladies and gentlemen,

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), which I am representing, and which has co-sponsored this forum at the invitation of the Chinese

People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, is mandated by the UN General Assembly to coordinate human settlements activities within the United Nations System and promote the sustainable development of towns and cities.

In Africa, we work with central and local governments and other partners to provide our technical assistance to develop policies, programmes and projects in the areas of:

1. Urban infrastructures development, Kenya, Cameroon,
2. Urban planning and management, Rwanda, Senegal
3. Land management and legislation, Benin, Eritrea
4. Housing and slum upgrading programmes, Nigeria, Tanzania
5. Post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation, Somalia, Liberia.

In China, we share, promote and publicize good policies, programme and projects from various cities through the Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme, UN-Habitat Scroll of Honor programme, such as

1. Yangzhou, conservation of old city and improvement of residential environment
2. Nanning, developing China's first Integrated City Emergency Response System
3. Shaoxing, preserving a unique cultural and historical heritage at a time of Rapid urbanization
4. Rizhao, transforming their city into a green home with new housing and infrastructure
5. Kunshan, granting migrants the right to essential services in the city.

UN-Habitat welcomes cities in Africa and China to join us in our quest for more sustainable urban development, because we believe that the challenges facing cities are numerous and daunting, and no entity, public or private, governmental or non-governmental, academic or practitioner, can address these challenges alone.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UN-Habitat wishes to work with you as a facilitator to develop new mechanisms and promote the cooperation between Africa and China through following ways:

Knowledge sharing: To share experiences on good policies and best practices both in China and Africa in the field of sustainable urban development;

1. Capacity Building: To develop training programmes for municipal executives and managers and policy makers on identified priorities and challenges in urban development.

2. Technology Transfer: To develop and establish pilot projects in African cities demonstrating the new technologies, products and services from China.
3. The African young professional scholarships for urban planners in Tongji University benefiting today many cities in Africa.

In this context, I highly appreciate the initiative taken by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the Wenzhou Enterprises Chamber of Commerce to organize this forum. I also highly appreciate the distinguished participants attending and making contributions to the forum.

I am sure that if we join our hands and work harder, we can build a better urban future, for Africa, China and the world as whole.

I thank you for your kind attention