

21. Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

Mr. President,

I would like to begin by expressing the congratulations of the Bahraini delegation on your election as Chairperson of the 2nd Committee, and also to the rest of the members of the Bureau on their elections to their positions.

As we all know, the next few decades will see an unprecedented scale of urbanization in the developing world; This rapid urbanization will shape prospects for global economic growth, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. The opportunities presented by this transformation are huge and more must be done to maximize its potential benefits and to reduce its harmful consequences.

At the Rio+20 Conference the urban challenge facing us all was recognized and placed high on the global agenda. Bahrain welcomes the further commitment to promoting an integrated approach to planning and building sustainable cities and urban settlements, in addition to the commitment to strengthening cooperation mechanisms to advance the coordinated implementation of the Habitat agenda. It is in our interests to cooperate constructively to agree upon both integrated and responsive approaches that recognize interlinkages and avoid separate tracks to confront the economic, social and environmental changes that will be witnessed, it is a universal duty to mobilize resources and contribute effectively to the planning and creation of a safe and sustainable environment for all to live in.

Mr. President,

Bahrain has afforded the issue of sustainable urban development increased attention under our wise leadership. In line with the visions of HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, government programmes have been tailored specifically towards promoting environmentally sustainable towns and cities with adequate shelter for all.

In 2007, the Special Citation of the Habitat Scroll of Honour was bestowed upon His Royal Highness Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa. Bahrain has improved the living standards of all its citizens through a concerted focus on better housing policies, poverty alleviation, sustainable urban development. Bahrain has developed into a thriving and diversified economy with the provision of social welfare support and a focus on educational opportunities and jobs for all. Bahrain has demonstrated that it is possible to eradicate extreme poverty and bring about social justice through good urban governance, socially inclusive housing policies and housing finance systems.

The Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa UN-Habitat Award is a further testimony to Bahrain's commitment to strengthening the Human Settlements Programme, by encouraging individuals, organisations and institutions to implement the Habitat agenda

Mr. President,

Despite our advances nationally, we acknowledge that there is still more to be done. Bahrain's population density is one of the highest in the world. We recognize the importance of balancing a growing population and a vibrant economy with a manageable and sustainable level of our environmental capacity. In this regard, it is our belief that the role of UN-Habitat must be further promoted and its ability to effectively monitor urbanization at the international level must be enhanced, to allow the formulation of adequate responses to the new challenges all countries will face in the wake of such rapid urbanization. Bahrain has taken concrete steps in this regard, and would like to note the recent signing of a Cooperation Agreement in the field of Sustainable Urban Environment between the Kingdom of Bahrain and UN-Habitat, on the sidelines of the 6th World Urban Forum held in Napoli (1-6 Sep 2012), according to which a new office for UN-Habitat will be established in Bahrain. This agreement will facilitate the provision of specialized national strategies for urban development and sustainable development programmes, in addition to promoting capacity building. Bahrain hopes that this UN-Habitat office will contribute to the advancement of the work of UN-Habitat on a regional level and result in the

exchange of expertise and experiences with our neighbouring countries, helping to consolidate socially, economically and environmentally sustainable cities in the region.

Mr. President,

The challenges we face can only be overcome through an integrated approach where each party assumes its responsibilities. We must begin to take action now, before we exceed our environmental thresholds, and damage both the social and economic foundations of our societies. We must not forget the importance of integrating the issue of global urban development with the post-2015 development agenda, in addition to taking it into adequate consideration when defining a new set of sustainable development goals.

Thank you, Mr. President.