



Statement by Dr. Joan Clos,
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Director of UN-HABITAT
on the occasion of
first World Assembly of Islamic Cities
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It gives me great pleasure to address the first ever World Assembly of Islamic Cities, held in the beautiful City of Qazvin. The City of Qazvin is a very significant and historical city. I know through UN-Habitat's long relationship with Qazvin that this city has demonstrated concretely huge potential to achieve sustainable development.

We at UN-Habitat believe strongly that we must partner with governments at all levels in the Muslim world. Today, social and environmental challenges and their unsustainable conditions are at their highest levels. The side effects and consequences of inappropriate conditions of life, social rupture, and the high level of environmental pollution have caused serious challenges to mankind. All these problems have led to major global threats such as the appalling condition of climate change and global warming. A critical trait of the rapid urbanization process in some countries, including the Arab states, is the large demographic youth bulge, which is underscored by significant youth under- and unemployment rates. This Youth Bulge is a double edged sword. If governments develop youth policies which engage and support youth in education, training and access to employment, youth can become powerful and positive change agents. Without these policies, youth become disillusioned and frustrated. Policy makers have not fully capitalized on the "window of opportunity" that the youth bulge presented which as proposed by the 2007 World Development Report, namely through broadening opportunities, developing capabilities and enhancing the resilience of youth. Youth have become increasingly disenfranchised and alienated, and in many ways represent a marginalized generation. Youth graduate from university without being able to find employment, while the ones that do are unlikely to receive any opportunities for professional development.

What is clear though is that there is hope. The challenge is to reshape social and urban policies towards sustainable economic growth and adequate living conditions for rapidly expanding numbers of young and poor urbanites. Well planned and designed cities can

generate better financing, higher levels of wellbeing and better employment opportunities. Young people should be active participants in the future of human settlements. UN-Habitat is promoting the economic role of cities both in the Arab world and beyond. We also want to propose to rethink the approach to urban development and to prepare all together a New Urban Agenda, more holistic, able to provide affordable housing and infrastructure, more access to basic services, and reduce poverty and urban inequality.

We should start to discuss this New Urban Agenda towards the Third United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat III, in 2016, and in the framework of the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

I again congratulate and thank the City of Qazvin for taking the initiative in organizing this conference, and the Middle East Regional Centre for Best Practices for supporting them in this. It is meetings such as this which will begin to pave the way for true urban sustainability in this region and beyond.

In closing, I would like to invite all of you to come to the Seventh session of the World Urban Forum to be held in Medellin, Colombia, from 5 to 11 April 2014 to continue debating and building the consensus of the new urban agenda. We hope to hear the voice of the Youth from the Arab States in the World Urban Forum Youth Assembly that will be part of the programme.

I sincerely wish the deliberations of the World Assembly of Islamic Cities a great success and shall look forward to its recommendations for implementation of the World Urban Forum in Colombia next year.

Thank you