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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD HABITAT DAY

7 October 2013

For more than half a century, most countries have experienced rapid urban growth and increased use of motor vehicles. This has led to urban sprawl and even higher demand for motorized travel, with a range of environmental, social and economic consequences.

Urban transport is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and a cause of ill-health due to air and noise pollution. The traffic congestion created by unsustainable transportation systems is responsible for significant economic and productivity costs for commuters and goods transporters.

These challenges are most pronounced in developing country cities. It is here that approximately 90 per cent of global population growth will occur in the coming decades. These cities are already struggling to meet increasing demand for investment in transportation. They must also face the issue of ‘transport poverty’. Millions of people are denied the benefits of public or private transport due to cost; persons with disabilities and the elderly are regularly excluded by practicality; and safety is a serious issue for many women, young persons and minorities made vulnerable by faith or ethnicity.

Mobility is not just a question of building wider or longer roads; it is about providing appropriate and efficient systems that serve the most people in the best, most equitable manner. This includes encouraging a transition from car use to trains, buses and bicycles, and bringing more pedestrians onto well-lit sidewalks.

People need to be able to get to work, school, hospitals and places of recreation safely and quickly. Getting mobility right can regenerate urban centres, boost productivity and make a city attractive for all users – from investors to visitors and residents.

Urban transport is central to sustainable development. On this World Habitat Day let us commit to making our cities and towns accessible to all.