

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE TO THE FOUNDING CONGRESS
OF UNITED CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
Paris, 2 May 2004**

*Delivered by Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director,
United Nations Human Settlements Programme*

It is a pleasure to send my warmest greetings to this Founding Congress of United Cities and Local Governments. I would like to congratulate the mayors and local leaders from around the world on this initiative, which has great potential to significantly strengthen your role at the international level.

The creation of United Cities and Local Governments as a global coordinating mechanism for activities of local authorities signals a new step in a long process that started at the HABITAT II Conference in Istanbul in 1996. I would like to commend you for your continued collaboration with agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, in particular UN-HABITAT, in addressing the key issues facing cities and communities in this urban millennium.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted in September 2000, is the international community's main focus for our common efforts to create a better, safer, more just world. In a relatively short time, the Millennium Development Goals have gained tremendous currency as the development framework used by different partners, primarily in international circles, but increasingly at the national level.

As you know, one of those goals is to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. Still, the overall framework for monitoring and implementation could and should better recognize the "urban" and "local" dimensions, especially given that most of the world's population growth occurs in the cities of developing countries. Urban populations in developing countries will double over the next 30 years. The number of people living in slums and squatter settlements may also rise if local authorities do not take determined and concerted action to address the needs of the urban poor and the challenge of good urban governance.

United Cities and Local Governments can be an effective instrument towards this end. Your organization embodies the commitment of mayors and local leaders to create a unified global voice for cities. And it reflects the understanding that the challenges of a rapidly globalizing and urbanizing world need to be addressed primarily by the sphere of government that is closest to the citizens.

For its part, the United Nations General Assembly recently decided that local authorities will participate in the deliberations of the Governing Council of UN-

HABITAT, which is the UN focal point for local authorities. This will allow your Organization to strengthen its partnerships with governments in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. After all, your efforts are essential not only to the goal of improving lives for slum-dwellers, but to all the other goals, from health, hunger and education to water, sanitation and sustainability in general.

I look forward to working with you and wish every success to the future work of United Cities and Local Governments.