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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE TO THE "AFRICITIES SUMMIT"
Yaoundé, 2 December 2003

*Delivered by Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director,
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It is a great pleasure to send my greetings to everyone who has gathered for this Third Africities Conference. Your presence underscores your recognition of the magnitude and urgency of the urban challenge facing Africa. And the impressive turn-out of mayors, government officials, representatives of the private sector and civil society, as well as a number of development partners, shows you understand that this challenge can be tackled only by collective engagement. I would like to commend the *Municipal Development Partnership* for its vigorous efforts and leadership in support of local authorities in Africa.

Seven years ago, representatives of the African people, probably including some of you here today, were in Istanbul to help world leaders chart the Habitat Agenda -- a collective action plan that commits us all to make human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, as well as equitable, sustainable and productive. The guiding principles for implementing the agenda were empowerment, transparency and participation. Capacity building and institutional development, particularly through the process of effective decentralization, were emphasized as critical factors.

Progress since then has been encouraging in some respects. But when world leaders held a five-year review, they concluded that poverty, environmental degradation and other factors were continuing to obstruct efforts to build sustainable urban settlements. The alarms were sounded again just last month with the release of UN-HABITAT's latest *Global Report on Human Settlements*, which revealed that between 40 and 70 per cent of the urban population in Africa lives in slums -- areas characterized by their lack of basic services, substandard housing, overcrowding, hazardous locations, insecurity of tenure and social exclusion. Those numbers should alarm us all.

This conference is an opportunity to bring much-needed attention to these issues, and to address some of the underlying factors that have hindered sustainable urbanization in Africa. I urge you to make this a priority, and do your utmost to make African towns and cities places of opportunity and prosperity for all. UN-HABITAT, for its part, as the UN agency for cities and other human settlements and the UN system's focal point for local authorities, is working hard in all these areas, in particular the lack of access to safe water and sanitation. And the entire UN system remains strongly committed to supporting the local authority movement in Africa. In that spirit of partnership, I wish you every success in these important deliberations.