

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY LN SISULU CHAIR OF THE AFRICAN
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND URBAN
DEVELOPMENT AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
MINISTERIAL SPECIAL CONFERENCE**

3 April 2006
United Nations Office Nairobi
Nairobi, Kenya

Your Excellencies

The AU Commissioner for Social Affairs Adv. Bience Gawanas

The UN-Habitat Executive Director Dr. Anna Tibaijuka

Ambassadors

Members of the African Diplomatic Core

Distinguished guests

Country representatives and friends:

For most of you who have been in this environment for longer than others, you will recall hopefully with some warmth, our meeting in Durban, having been collectively galvanised by the urgency we felt around our common challenge of rapid urbanisation. Our resolve to find an answer solidly buttressed by the Declaration of the Executive Council of the AU which was formulated as *Decision 29* which read, and I quote:

. . . if left unchecked, rapid urbanization is leading to the urbanization of poverty in the continent, with attendant problems that have condemned the majority of urban dwellers to unemployment, food insecurity and life under squalid conditions in slums and other unplanned neighbourhood without basic services such as decent housing water and sanitation, and the high risk this implies to their health and safety . . .

For some of us, who might have been at the meeting, it was a historic moment. Forty countries responded to that call, sending high level and very

senior delegations to our Inaugural Meeting, to deliberate on the establishment mechanisms and the programme of action of the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development.

We elaborated on and adopted the *Enhanced Framework of Implementation* as the core of the programme of action of AMCHUD. We agreed our focus was to be on slums. We agreed in particular, that:

In a rapidly urbanising Africa, the promotion of balanced and sustainable urbanisation requires, more than ever before, strategic, integrated planning, building consensus, gender mainstreaming, capacity building, international co-operation, south-south co-operation and conflict resolution systems.

A year and some three weeks later, we have now converged, again collectively, here in Nairobi to enhance the programme of action that we agreed to in Durban.

Your response to the invitations that have been sent for the Ministerial Special Conference has truly been phenomenal. It was overwhelming. I am told that over thirty Ministers and Deputy Ministers are present here. Ambassadors are also present. And I am told that the Ambassadors in particular did not take kindly at not receiving the invitation to the Ministerial Special Conference and promptly and correctly summoned the Secretariat for an explanation. At the same time, over 30 senior officials represented by Permanent Secretaries, Advisors, Director Generals and Deputy Director Generals are present. Such is the interest and the enthusiasm that has been generated by the Conference that it is possible to conclude that the stage is set for deliberations that will provide the concrete results we are looking forward to, namely, a framework for the mobilisation of governments, civil society and institutions in Africa towards the goal of preventing slum proliferation by 2020.

On behalf of the Bureau therefore I would like to thank you all for the overwhelming response. [Some delegations, I am told, even overcame the difficulties that they had individually to afford payments to be present at the Conference.] Furthermore, those that unfortunately could not afford to be present based on reasons of prior commitments forwarded their sincere apologies and full support.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome, consistent with the concerns expressed in the *Enhanced Framework* of the Inaugural Meeting of AMCHUD extended a further glimmer of hope on the challenge of slums. In this respect the World Summit Outcome read:

In pursuance of our commitment to achieve sustainable development, we further resolve to achieve significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020, recognising the urgent need for the provision of increased resources for affordable housing and housing-related infrastructure, prioritising slum prevention and slum upgrading, and to encourage support for the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation and its Slum Upgrading Facility.

Thus, where it came to slums the decision of the World Summit on the slums did not falter. It provided for the prioritisation by governments of the prevention of governments and an increase in the resources required achieving that objective. This to me, is the signal achievement of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, providing us with the unique opportunity to enhance further our programme of action. It is indicating the growing prominence that the challenge of slum prevention will continue to receive by governments. It provides us with an opportunity to mobilise governments, society and institutions for its implementation in our favour.

The achievement was one that resulted from the engagements made by AMCHUD immediately after Durban at the 20th Governing Council of UNHABITAT, here in Nairobi. It was here that the battle was started and friends won such as the representative of the Holy City who at this venue spoke eloquently about the moral correctness of the solutions we are seeking to achieve regarding slums. His, was a plea for understanding by those that were resisting the outcome that the Heads of State reached at the World Summit.

After two full days of negotiating the matter was left to the 13th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, to resolve. And when this forum too failed it was referred to the Heads of State.

The question that now arises is what it is that AMCHUD does to achieve the provisions expressed in the *2005 World Summit Outcomes* to strengthen and develop further *Decision 29* of the Executive Council and the *Enhanced Framework*. For clearly, if over 70 percent of our urban population lives in slums the actions needed to confront to prevent slum proliferation need to be our urgent concern. It should be an urgent concern to us that as a result of their living conditions the quality of life of our people is declining whether it is in the area of health, education and even security.

An August 2005 report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa titled *The Millennium Development Goals in Africa: Progress and challenges* paints the picture for us in this regard. It highlights that in 2000 over 290 million of the population lived in extreme poverty a figure that rose from 217 million in 1999. Life expectancy has declined from 50 years to 47 years. Primary education completion rates declined from 57 in 1999 to 55 in 2000. Likewise, access to improved sanitation declined during the same period from 55 to 54. By contrast the countries in the developed world saw improvements between 1999 and 2002

in average incomes that increased by 21%. The number of people living in extreme poverty declined by 130 million. Adult life expectancy rose from 63 years to 65 years. Primary school enrolments and access to water and sanitation increased too.

Therefore, if for 15 years progress in Africa in achieving the Millennium Development Goals has been at best slow and at worse regressing, there is now need to implement *Decision 29* of the Executive Council, the *Enhanced Framework* and the *2005 World Summit Outcomes* not through mere general commitments and statements but through a focused programme of action that increases the speed of the implementation of our decisions. As our established vehicle AMCHUD will be key in this regard.

This is an organisation that should have the capacity to monitor and evaluate the progress that countries are making in focusing on slum prevention and upgrading. It should be an organisation that enable and facilitates our five regions to implement decisions and carry out some of the actions that we would agree to. In addition, to assist its work, we must propose an urgent review of the institutions and the existing regularly, planning and implementation frameworks governing housing and human settlements in Africa. In the run-up to the three major events such as the World Urban Forum III, the 21st UNHABITAT Governing Council and the Biennial Ministerial Conference, both of which take place in 2007, these are the priority issues that would need to guide our work including a focus on land.

Since the vision of the African Union is to achieve "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa" on evidence from developed countries there is no other way of achieving that goal other than a focus on slum upgrading and prevention as the *Enhanced Framework* commands us. And this is the reason that

from the date that we formed as AMCHUD we set ourselves some ambitious goals.

We have made significant progress in the year since our inception. There is thus no doubt in my mind that we have begun to make a mark on issues that pertain to housing and shelter.

I have had occasion to refer to our Enhanced Framework and have been amazed, each time, at how rich and yet incisive it is. I marvel at how poignantly we have captured our challenges.

We have also been acutely aware that the international environment within which we operate has tested us to the limit. But as, I indicated, we have shown our mettle.

I trust therefore that in developing the outcomes of this Conference we would be able to map out the means and ways for enhancing this achievement.

I thank you.