

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING HON SOITA SHITANDA; MP DURING THE SPECIAL AFRICAN MINISTERS CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (AMCHUD) ON MONDAY 3RD APRIL 2006 AT THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE, GIGIRI.

H.E, The Vice President of the Republic of Kenya, Hon Dr. Arthur Moody Awori,
The AMCHUD Chair, Hon Dr. Lindiwe Sisulu,
AMCHUD Vice Chairs,
Fellow Hon. Ministers,
The Executive Director, UN-Habitat Dr Anna Tibaijuka,
AU Commissioner on Social Affairs, Madame Bience Gawanas,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be part of this eminent gathering that has come to Nairobi. During the two- day special conference, we will share in this vitally important discussion on how African countries can realize the commitments we, as Governments, have made to address the slum upgrading and prevention challenge in our respective countries.

I wish, also, to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to you all to our country Kenya and the City of Nairobi. As we say in Kiswahili, *Karibuni Sana*.

Your Excellency,

Gathered here today, are Ministers responsible for Housing and Urban Development from 42 African Nations, together with their delegations, who have come to attend this Special AMCHUD under the banner: **ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN AFRICA: Strategies for the Realization of the World Summit Commitments on Slums.**

Let me also take this opportunity, your Excellency, to pay special tribute to the Members of the AMCHUD Bureau and especially the Chair, Hon. Dr. Lindiwe Sisulu, for her vision and commitment to get the young AMCHUD organization take off.

The fact that we have gathered today shows the commitment of the African nations represented here to address the issue of slums which have invaded our cities.

I have always believed that Africa was created without slums, yet many our continent's cities are now shaped by the most visible manifestation of poverty; slums.

Hon Ministers,

Available statistics show that an estimated 72 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's urban population and about 28 per cent of Northern Africa's urban population lived in slums in 2001. This is in comparison to 32 per cent for the whole world.

Africa, had 187 million urban slum dwellers, or 20 per cent of the world's total urban slum population in 2001, compared to Latin America and the Caribbean with 128 million or about 14 per cent of the world's total urban slum population.

Unless we put significant interventions in place, the continent's urban slum population is likely to double every 15 years, as opposed to every 26 years for the population as a whole. The urban slum population is set to reach 332 million by 2015 and about 400 million by 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps the most significant challenge faced by the slums of African cities is the deplorable state of the physical infrastructure. More often than not, this is infrastructure dilapidated, unreliable or even non-existent. Infact, the worst problem is that of sanitation, and the pattern seems to be the same in all the cities in the African continent.

It is a sobering thought that almost all of the next one billion of net global population growth, over the next twelve to fifteen years, will take place in urban slums. Even more sobering is the thought: what will these conditions breed for the future? Hopelessness, crime, extremism, terrorism? How will Africa deal with these chickens when they come home to roost on its perch? Who will help this continent so that its cities do not continue to drift to levels that make them become dysfunctional and unmanageable?

Hon Ministers,

The African continent is not short of resources. We have natural human and financial resources as well as expertise, basic technology, culture and a work ethic whose combination can be utilized to provide services for improving the livelihoods of slum dwellers sustainably. With these immense resources, all we need to do is be proactive and adopt policies aimed at upgrading existing slums, improving housing and enhancing security tenure for slum dwellers.

We must also manage the forces of globalization which, to some extent, have contributed to urban poverty, disease and hunger. The same forces have, in some cases directly and in others indirectly, negatively impacted on the self-sufficiency of rural populations.

As we strive to provide for urban slum dwellers, we also need to recognize the interdependency and the socio economic dynamics between urban and rural areas. Unfortunately, urban and rural areas have traditionally, and still continue to be viewed as mutually exclusive and competing spheres both by local and central government and even by the international community.

Cities interact with rural areas in many ways. Cities absorb excess rural populations and offer market for farm produce and other rural products. They provide services and amenities such as referral hospitals and convenient 'one stop' shopping mega stores that may not be available in rural areas. Cities are also the locus of most global investment, communications and social change.

Rural areas, on the other hand, are the source of many products that are used in urban areas. Nairobi, for example, get its water from the rural

hinterland of Ndakaini. Most food consumed in this city is grown in rural areas.

The discrete consideration of rural development as completely distinct from urban development is, therefore, no longer valid.

Hon Ministers,

The 72 per cent of the urban residents in Africa living in slums without equitable access to land, adequate shelter and basic services do not live there because of choice. It is because the rural areas they have come from, have no sources of livelihoods and so they decide to migrate to the cities where, they think they can get employed and earn a living.

There is need for us as governments to industrialize rural areas in order to reverse rural-urban migration. This will decongest cities and ease the strain on physical infrastructure. There is also need to adopt a holistic development approach encompassing housing, agriculture, health and education, with close attention being paid to gender.

We as Ministers and policy makers must see 'rural' and 'urban' areas as parts of an economic, social and environmental whole.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate what Martin Luther King Jnr said in his speech "Where Do we go from here; Chaos or community?" delivered at a convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1967. And I quote.

"The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. It is socially as cruel and blind as the practice of cannibalism at the dawn of civilization, when men ate each other because they had not yet learned to take food from the soil or to consume the abundant animal life around them. The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty." We must overcome, We can overcome and we will overcome !

Thank you.

MONDAY, 3rd APRIL 2006

GIGIRI, NAIROBI