

SECOND WORLD URBAN FORUM

Barcelona, September 13, 2004

FIRST PLENARY SESSION

European Commission Opening Address

Mr Chairman [~~Mr Secretary-General of the United States~~ ^{Nations}, Mrs. Executive Director of UN-Habitat],
Excellencies, Ministers, Mayors and Ambassadors
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address you today on behalf of the European Commission on the occasion of this Second session of the World Urban Forum.

1. I would like first of all to reaffirm our concern, shared with the international community, on the challenges that the process of rapid urbanisation poses to the sustainability of human settlements around the world. One of the most striking result of this process is the urbanisation of poverty. The old perception that poverty is located in rural areas whereas urban dwellers benefit of a privileged access to modern services has changed. At the same time, it is now accepted that urbanisation is an unstoppable trend and the debate turns around how to manage the process instead of how to reverse it.

Over the last decades, urban population has grown rapidly world-wide, mostly due to the spectacular increase of people living in poor-country's cities and towns. This growth has not only been accompanied by an increase of poverty, it has also given rise to the phenomenon of exclusion and marginalisation. As pointed out by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Director of UN-Habitat "in a world also beset by conflict and intolerance", "finding ways to live together is what cities are all about". We therefore welcome the World Urban Forum as a place where all stakeholders interact effectively to contribute to that objective

2. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, which the European Union has fully subscribed to, rightly paid due attention to the incidence of urban poverty on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Not only by inclusion of the specific target of "improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020", but also because without a significant reduction of urban poverty, the overarching goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015 would simply be under threat.

The growing number of fora to advance collective knowledge of urban issues as well as the launching of new initiatives are a sign of this increasing concern that we welcome and are willing to support. This is the case of *Cities Alliance*, the ~~a~~ global initiative for sustainable urban development, to which the European Commission hopes to adhere very soon. *↑ many of you know and*

On the operational side, the ^{European} Commission is also ready to jointly analyse ~~options~~ *proposals* presented by recipient countries to increase our financial involvement as it has been the case in the past.

3. In recent years, the Community has supported urban development actions in the various geographic regions covered by co-operation agreements.

This is the case of the assistance given to the *African, Caribbean and Pacific countries* signatories of the Cotonou Agreement. A recent evaluation showed that close to 5% of EDF resources have been targeting urban centres. The share reaches 10-12% if water supply projects in towns are included.

This is the case of the *Asia-Urbs programme*, in operation since 1998, where financial support is given to local government partnerships to undertake urban development projects and to create and reinforce networks to share knowledge and experience.

The *Urb-LatinAmerica programme* is another example of a city-to-city co-operation activity supported by the European Commission. This programme which started in 1995 aims at promoting the establishment of lasting networking partnerships between local authorities of the European Union and Latin America. Working as part of a network encourages participants to share experiences and to draw lessons from partners facing similar problems.

4. As far as the future is concerned, the European Commission intends to continue to be active in the field of urban development.

In the year 2004, we have engaged in a process for reinforcing the collaboration with UN-Habitat as the natural partner for human settlements issues. The axes of practical collaboration with UN-Habitat will be defined in a joint conference to be held in Nairobi, in January 2005, where EC support to the *Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme* will be discussed together with the authorities of the partner countries. *The MoU to be signed soon between UN-HABITAT and the ACP Secretariat will help to finalize promptly this process*

The European Commission will also present at the Nairobi Conference its *new guidelines on sustainable urban development*. We are confident to agree on this occasion on an improved sectoral approach to urban interventions, which puts good urban government, good urban management and leadership of municipal authorities at the centre of the overall process.

Mr Chairman, to conclude.

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11 The European Commission very much welcomes this second session. Two of my colleagues will also actively participate in the next set of events and dialogues and take this opportunity to present and discuss our views and listen to other participants suggestions and proposals. On this occasion, our Director Mr VALETTE will officially on next Wednesday on behalf EC the joint EU/ UN-HABITAT initiative on urban environment. Moreover, the European Commission counts on maintaining and increasing its support to urban centres in the future. But that will depend to a great extent to the demand generated by concerned stakeholders and by the priority accorded to it by national governments at the initial stages of the programming phases.

In this respect, we believe that the advocacy role and advisory services of UN-HABITAT will constitute a valuable help for the partner countries in order to incorporate urban development to their overall development agendas.