



**Opening Address by Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka  
Under-Secretary-General and  
Executive Director of UN-HABITAT  
On the occasion of Third Session of World Urban Forum  
Vancouver,  
Canada, 19 June 2006**

The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada,  
H.E. Mr. Ali Mohamed Shein, Vice President of Tanzania,  
H.E. Noli de Castro, Vice President of the Philippines,  
Hon. Gordon Campbell, Premier of British Columbia,  
Your Worship Mayor Sam Sullivan of Vancouver,  
Hon. Diane Finley, Minister Human Resources and Social Development, Canada and all Hon.  
Ministers and Heads of delegations,  
Commissioner General for WUF III Mr. Charles Kelly,  
Your Excellencies,  
Mayors and Parliamentarians for Habitat,  
Distinguished Veterans of the Habitat I Conference of 1976,  
Leaders of Civil Society, Habit Professionals, and Media representatives,  
Colleagues, friends from all over the world,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Before proceeding, I wish to request that this August Assembly rises to one minute of silence in memory and honour of two great legends in the matter of sustainable urbanization. The first is Canada's adopted daughter, Jane Jacobs, who passed away only this April. In her seminal treatise, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, she laid the foundation into many of the issues before this World Urban Forum. Ms. Jacobs was an irrepressible champion of integrated, manageable communities, and of the diversity of people, transportation, architecture, commerce, culture and sports, etc. She is the mother of an inclusive city. The second is the late Prime Minister of Lebanon, Mr. Rafik Hariri. At the Barcelona Forum Mr. Hariri was awarded a Special Citation of the Habitat Scroll of Honour for his successful people-centred post conflict reconstruction of Lebanon and the City of Beirut. Sadly soon after that he was to lay down his life in the course of peace, justice and freedom. May God grant these great Habitat Agenda partners eternal rest.

Mr. Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me thank the Government and people of Canada for your generous offer to host this third session of the World Urban Forum. UN-HABITAT is proud to have this picturesque city of Vancouver in British Columbia as its birth place. I wish to thank you Mr. Prime Minister for gracing this occasion with your personal presence. I thank Hon. Minister Diane Finlay, the First Co-Chair of the Forum, as well as the Commissioner General Charles Kelly and his entire team for their hard work and wonderful hospitality. As convenor of this Forum let me also thank and welcome the two Vice Presidents and all participants and wish you fruitful deliberations.

Distinguished Delegates,

The 100 years from 1950 to 2050 will be remembered for the greatest social, cultural, economic and environmental transformation in history – the urbanization of humanity. With half of us now occupying urban space, the future of the human species is tied to the city. How we plan and govern our cities will determine whether our collective future will be bright and sustainable or brutal and chaotic.

The itinerary leading to our meeting today is Stockholm, Vancouver, Istanbul, New York, Nairobi, Barcelona and, again, Vancouver. This itinerary represents a global march in pursuit of a

sustainable city. As instruments of governance, this remarkable series of conferences has been primarily political, raising awareness and seeking consensus among key actors on how to govern our cities more effectively, and for the good of all. Along the way, we have become more knowledgeable and more practical, so that each step we take helps sharpen our focus and define our trajectory.

Environmental and urban development problems were not on the horizon at the San Francisco Conference of 1945 when the UN was born. Stockholm 1972 was time for the first UN conference on the human environment. It was to be followed by Habitat I 1976 and Habitat II 1996 both driven by the official side of the governance equation in pursuit of sustainable human settlements. Governments came together to share their policies and programmes and to report on what works and what does not. Against a backdrop of rampant rural-urban migration, this continuing dialogue culminated in the Istanbul conference dubbed the City Summit. Rich and poor nations adopted a set of principles and a global plan of action – the Habitat Agenda – that all governments, local authorities and their partner groups agreed to use as a guide to sustainable urban development and adequate shelter for all.

It would be fair to say that each of the Habitat conferences understood full well that civil society is central to good urban governance. Efforts were made in 1972, 1976 and, most notably, in 1996 to bring all partner groups, particularly local authorities, into the process of urban governance, using the United Nations as a primary facilitator. It was decided by the UN General Assembly, in view of the complexities of urban issues and the number of interest groups involved, that a separate forum – the World Urban Forum – be established as a means of engaging and learning from all social actors to further the governance equation. WUF is therefore a partners' forum on the Habitat Agenda.

In the middle of these steps to construct a space and an architecture for continued dialogue and exchange, came the 2000 millennial meeting of world leaders in New York, their adoption of the Millennium Declaration, and the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals. These Goals represent the first definition of common development priorities by the international community and, not surprisingly, nearly all of them could be seen as key steps in improving urban life and settlements.

The sustainable city is now within sight. We have the global statement of political priorities by world leaders, a set of measurable targets, a global plan of action, policy guidelines and recommendations, and an increasingly engaged civil society.

Why, then, are our cities – in both the developed and developing world – becoming less and less sustainable? Why are urban slums, which now contain over one billion people and their myriad of problems, still growing at a rate that outpaces all our attempts to deal with them? Why is urban sprawl and our gross consumption of energy becoming more worrisome? Why have the leaders of nearly all member states not acted fully on their commitments?

Duccio Turin, the late Deputy Secretary General of the Vancouver Conference 30 years ago, believed that our failure to follow through is a failure of political will, a failure that exposes itself in the lack of support for proper urban planning and urban development institutions especially in the area of housing and infrastructure finance, in the lack of enabling legislation and technical support for local authorities; in the lack of openness and inclusion in decision-making processes; in the lack of good information on the benefits and costs of urban development; and, above all, a failure to recognise that cities and the people who live and work in cities, are integral to national development irrespective of gender, ethnicity, or age.

Clearly, if the evolution of urban governance is to keep pace with the revolution of urbanization, our

politics must also become urbanized. New ideas, from urban policy and urban finance, investment priorities, to tenure reform and participatory decision-making, can help update the political landscape by planting the city – as the essential “community of communities” – squarely in the mainstream of national and international politics.

We now have many examples of how this can be done and how civil society may be engaged to help make needed changes to the political equation. At the very top, the United Nations itself is undergoing a reform process that promises a more open and inclusive system. This World Urban Forum, which has attracted Head of Governments, Ministers and Parliamentarians from all corners of the world, is evidence that UN Member States do want local authorities and civil society including the private sector to bring forward their success stories, to share best practice and good policies, to debate new approaches, and to do this in an open and inclusive way that offers political leaders at all levels bold strategies that will carry them and their constituents safely into an urbanized world.

The sub-theme of this Third World Urban Forum, “turning ideas into action” identifies the precise point where we are most in need of new ideas. I trust the agenda of this forum has been designed to encourage the exploration of “meta-ideas” – ideas on the implementation of yet new ideas.

It is my hope that your deliberations will assist me to compile a report that I will, on your behalf, submit to the Governing council of UN-HABITAT when it meets in its legislative capacity next April in Nairobi. The Governing Council would then forward your recommendations to the UN General Assembly, and this way take into account your inputs into its decision making.

Let me once again express my sincere gratitude to the Government and people of Canada and to all of you.

I thank you for your kind attention.