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## Speech of Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations

The holding of this Third Session of the World Urban Forum in Vancouver has historic resonance for the United Nations. It was in this great city that the agency we now know as UN-HABITAT was born. It was here, 30 years ago, that the idea of creating a body to deal with where we live and how we live was first brought into the international limelight.

Over the past three decades, our world has become more urbanized, congested and polluted, and less equitable. Satellite images reveal the huge and growing "footprints" of cities: their sprawl into plains, forests and wetlands; their fouling of rivers, lakes and coastlines with waste; their filling the air with smoke and smog. Cities, which are now home to half of humankind, are among the greatest users of natural resources and major emitters of greenhouse gases.

Another picture of cities, less visible from space but no less real, is that of poverty and deprivation. More than half the urban population of the developing world lives in slums, with little or no access to decent housing, clean water, basic sanitation, regular jobs or steady income. The despair is such that families are forced to choose between sending their

children to school or using them to fetch water, and between feeding their children or saving their meagre funds to buy much-needed medicines.

In our interdependent world, opportunity and deprivation are interlinked. The consequences of over-consumption and pollution, hunger and deprivation, crime and insecurity know no borders. If not handled well, they can generate intolerance, migration, and even instability and extremism. On the other hand, cities are also leading incubators of knowledge, birthplaces of technological innovation, and repositories of cultural riches. Their density can make them efficient places for living, consuming and producing.

This forum is well placed to address the challenges facing cities and to advance the cause of sustainable urban development. We have ideas and best practices to guide us, including participatory planning, "green" architecture, cooperative housing finance and successful instances of inner city revival. Together, we must scale up our efforts, and make our urban planet more just, equitable and sustainable for all its inhabitants. In that hopeful spirit, please accept my best wishes for the success of your important deliberations.