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CLIMATE CHANGE

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates;

The world is experiencing unprecedented levels of urbanization as the majority of people now reside in urban areas. By 2030, three-quarters of the world's population will be urban, and the biggest cities will be found in the developing world. As climate change threatens to change the face of the planet, mega-cities loom as giant potential flood or other disaster traps, especially for billions of the world's urban poor – who are often in slums – and who are always the most exposed and the most vulnerable.

However, (and this is key) it is no coincidence that global climate change has become a leading international development issue precisely at the same time and virtually at the same rate as the world has become urbanized. This is because how we plan, manage, operate and consume energy in our cities is, in fact, the key driver behind the phenomenon of global warming. 75% of global energy consumption occurs in cities. 80% of Greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming come from cities. Roughly half of this amount comes from burning fossil fuels in cities for urban transport; the other half comes from energy in-use in buildings as well as for use in appliances; both hallmarks of our built environment and our quality-of-life in urban places. Indeed, the two (climate change and urbanization) are virtually inseparable.

Therefore it is crucial to recognize that cities and urban residents are not just seen as victims of climate change in terms of sea-level rise but part of the problem of climate change. And if cities are part of the problem, that means they are also inevitably part of the solution.

While cities and local authorities must indeed “adapt” to the impacts of climate change within their boundaries, they remain in the driver’s seat in terms of continued efforts at mitigation. For example, urban transport is the planet’s fastest growing source of GHG emissions. But there is still time to reduce the overall impact of this ecological catastrophe by more responsible planning and management of how, where and by what mode of transport we move ourselves and the goods we produce and consume around our urban areas. And this problem of transport is compounded by the fact that millions, upon millions of our urban residents living in developing country cities have virtually no access at all to any sort of motorized transport, much less a private automobile and so pollute next to nothing now. But we need to pay closer attention to the coming environmental implications when these same urban residents also demand mobility and transport just like any other urban resident.

In order to successfully answer this challenge of cities and global climate change, UN-Habitat believes we need to encourage a number of measures to be taken, including stricter energy efficiency standards in fuel consumption from transport; energy efficiency in building construction and use; as well as improving global standards for appliance manufacturing and importation applied across the board in developed and developing country cities alike. After all, the majority of energy is consumed in cities. Therefore, it is an urban issue. Best practices on climate-friendly can be shared between cities of both north and south.

Large-scale primarily urban-based electricity utilities in developing countries and cities have a strong economic incentives to regularize electricity provision to slum communities and other urban low-income communities in order to reduce and avoid so much technical energy loss. This idea is particularly important in countries and cities that rely on coal-based electricity generation. Reducing the overall energy consumption footprint in this manner will have strong positive global environmental benefits.

Lastly, improving transportation systems through pricing, investment, and particular appropriate technological options such as encouraging bicycling as well as regulatory measures to reduce urban traffic congestion are also key.

In conclusion, in the view of UN-Habitat, the time to act is now and the place to act (in terms of both mitigation and adaptation) is in the cities of the world – where the locus of the problem and therefore the solution, most firmly rests.

Thanks you, Mr. Chairman.