

**Nanjing, China, 3 November 2008 - Secretary-General's message to the opening ceremony of the Fourth Session of the World Urban Forum [delivered by Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Sha Zukang]**

It gives me great pleasure to send greetings to all the participants in the fourth session of the World Urban Forum. Your host, the City of Nanjing, has survived many tests and is an appropriate place to gather to consider the challenges of sustainable urbanization. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that in 2008 Nanjing won the highest award conferred by the United Nations system in this field, the Special Citation of the Habitat Scroll of Honour.

Projections show that by the year 2030, cities will be home to two-thirds of the global population. Never before has the world witnessed such rapid urbanization. But at the dawn of this new urban era, roughly a third of the world's urban population lives in slums and informal settlements. If current trends continue, this figure could reach 2 billion by 2030. The provision of basic services and decent and affordable housing is no longer just a sectoral objective it is a strategic means for attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

Rapid urbanization also has important links to the major crises facing the world today.

Urban areas consume most of world's energy and are generating the bulk of our waste, including greenhouse gas emissions. Helping cities produce less waste and emissions and consume less energy is an integral part of our work to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

In addition, high food and fuel prices and global financial turmoil rooted in part in housing markets have combined to form a triple crisis that threatens to erase years of effort to eradicate poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We must not let this happen.

The concept of harmonious urbanization should guide our work. This forum is well placed to contribute significantly to our shared goal of making our cities healthier, safer, economically vibrant and more just and equitable for all.