

Harmonious Urbanization: The Challenge of Balanced Territorial
Development

Remarks by Rt. Hon. Raila Odinga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya at the Fourth session of the World Urban Forum, Nanjing, China.

Your Excellency the Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China,
Your Excellency the Minister of Housing and Urban-Rural
Development, Jiang Weixin,

Your Excellency the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban
KiMoon,

The Honourable Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of
UN-Habitat, Mrs Anna Tibaijuka,

Honourable colleagues and guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy to be with you here today to share some thoughts on what began as an isolated problem taught in schools as rural urban migration. It has since developed into a crisis of global dimension.

There are those who believe that human beings began life in rural settings. The rural settings may have been the Garden of Eden as given in some religious accounts or in the savannahs and grazing fields of present-day East Africa as evolutionists say.

We clearly did not begin life as urban dwellers. But we have become urban dwellers and the whole world is going to the city.

The 2007 UN report on urbanization told us that half of the world's 6.7 billion people will be living in urban areas by the end of this year.

The UN predicts that by 2030, the number of city inhabitants will be over five billion, or 60 per cent of world population.

We have been warned that unless policy makers undertake a radical rethink, we face disaster.

When we look at the progress of human migration to urban centres over the years, we will know that time is not on our side and we will treat 2030 or 2050 as if they are next year if not next week.

It took about six millennia for cities of more than 100,000 people to emerge. By around 1800, only three per cent of the world's population lived in cities. Now it is above the 50 per cent mark.

It is projected that in the next fifty years, two-thirds of humanity will be living in towns and cities.

Some publications say we have moved from being *Homo Sapiens* whose concerns were limited to searching for food through hunting and gathering in rural settings and become *Homo Urbanus* who want nothing to do with rural life. The question is, are our urban centres and cities ready for this phenomenon?

I ask whether our cities are ready because there appears to be some agreement that the earlier response, where we tried to stem the tide by

preventing people from moving to the cities, never worked and never will.

Urbanisation has become inevitable. As a result, we have no option but to make our cities accommodate our people. In Africa, we are particularly in danger. Huge parts of the Continent have been affected by severe climate changes. Climate change and exploding population growth have made farming less attractive. The land is no longer productive, the rains are scarce and even where the rain is available the size of arable land has become smaller because of rising human population.

Africa's urbanisation problem has been complicated by the many man made calamities like civil wars which for long ravaged the Continent. Wars drove people from rural areas into the cities. They also drained the economies of some countries and destroyed infrastructure.

In Kenya, we have seen our capital City, Nairobi, which was once surrounded with lush greenery, succumb to pressure of urban population and rising slums.

In 1960, Nairobi's population was about 250,000. Today, it has about three million people. We have tried to fight back and keep our forests and the Nairobi National Park, which is famous as the only one within a walking distance of a city.

But pressure is building as migrations to the city force the need for expansion.

The story of the pressure is the same almost everywhere. It is the story you hear in Mumbai, in Lagos, in Soweto and in many other cities.

People are moving to the cities because life is increasingly unbearable in rural areas.

Crops are failing, farmers can't make ends meet so they abandon their labour and move to urban centres.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here at the the World Urban Forum against the background of grim realities. Our people are moving to the cities and towns. But Rapid urbanization has impact on communities, cities, economies and policies.

I urge our delegates to give serious thoughts and attention to the crisis at hand. It is my hope that we will pick vital lessons out of this assembly, which we shall carry back to our various countries and start working on immediately.

We must start addressing poverty in cities, improve the urban Poor's access to basic facilities such as shelter, clean water and sanitation and achieve environment-friendly, sustainable urban growth and development. We have no option but to do it because every indication is that the world is coming to the city.

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