

Statement by Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka
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Under-Secretary-General of the
United Nations
on the occasion of the Dialogue
on investment in youth-led
development.

Nairobi, 31 March 2009

Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Young leaders from the Youth
Advisory Board,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to welcome you all
today to this special dialogue and to
reaffirm my faith in young people.

From the outset, I wish to repeat here that it is the firm conviction of UN-HABITAT that your role in making our cities better, safer, cleaner, greener, friendlier and more inclusive is absolutely essential.

Allow me at the outset to ask you all to give a big hand to the members of the Youth Advisory Board established in Nanjing China at recent fourth session of the World Urban Forum. We are proud that so many of you have travelled from so far away to be with us this here this week.

Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet at a time of dire economic crisis. If the financial tsunami is sweeping people's homes from under their feet in the United States and other rich countries, we have no time to lose when it comes to the fast urbanising developing countries, now home to 1 billion slum dwellers.

UN-HABITAT, the agency for the built environment, works to promote a better urban future for us all. It is our job to monitor progress on the Millennium Development Goals as we move beyond the halfway point towards the 2015 target year. And what transpires in this work is a shocking indictment: The latest research

shows that sub-Saharan Africa today still has the world's highest proportion of its city dwellers living in slums. They constitute 62 percent of Africa's urban populations. That compares to 43 percent in South Asia, 37 percent in East Asia, 28 percent in Southeast Asia, 27 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 15 percent in North Africa.

This is why UN HABITAT recognizes the importance of working with young people. It is why the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon himself contributed funding to our new Moonbeam Youth Training Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. It is why also we have established six pilot youth resource centres in cities in

East Africa, and six other cities in countries recovering from conflict.

Under the Millennium Development Goals, we are mandated by world leaders to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. I tell you this because already, the United Nations has calculated that the financial crisis with high and volatile food and energy prices, has pushed at least 100 million people around the world back into poverty. How many of you in this audience are aware that right here in our host country Kenya, millions of people are unable to buy food because of rising prices and drought brought on by climate change? Go to any shopping centre and you will see for

yourself the charities asking shoppers to donate food.

Even when times are good, access to financing is one of the biggest problems faced by young people, and especially people living in poverty .

These are indeed just some of the reasons why our last Governing Council passed a resolution stipulating that UN-HABITAT establish a special fund to support innovative youth-led urban development projects. Thanks to Norway the *Opportunities Fund for Urban Youth-led Development* has been launched with start up funding of 1 million US dollars per annum for the next two years. It is my fervent hope that others will

emulate Norway and support the fund.

We have called this dialogue to engage you as our partners in exploring the concept of youth led development by looking at concrete examples from your experiences in working with and supporting young people. This will help build a foundation on which the new fund can be guided.

The urgent priorities are getting government, the private sector and civil society bodies to understand the concerns of youth better so that they can respond better. We constantly need new ideas on boosting employment, training and education prospects. And at the same time we need to share our ideas better, promote adequate

shelter, secure tenure and rights such as inheritance, especially for women. Remember that rights for women are human rights, that the voices of women are our voices.

Young leaders of today and tomorrow,

Allow me to conclude by reminding everyone here that the world's young people, now numbering more than 1.3 billion, must be seen as a vanguard for development as well as key agents of positive social change.

At UN-HABITAT we recognize young people as agents of change and as the leaders of today and tomorrow. As adults we are listening to your ideas! We are proud to have you at our side at this

important Governing Council
meeting! Thank you.