

**Statement by Victor Ramirez Ruiz, President of the National Institute for Housing of the Republic of Cuba at the High Level Segment of the 22nd session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT. March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009.**

Mr. President  
Executive Director of UN-Habitat,  
Executive Director of UNEP  
Excellencies and Distinguished delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Mr. President

My delegation joins the congratulations extended to you by the Group of 77 and China and other delegations on the occasion of your election as President of the present Session and trusts on your wise leadership to conduct the deliberations and works of this meeting.

At the same time, we share the congratulations awarded by our Group to Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat and her team for the work they do.

Mr. President

More than three decades ago we attended in the city of Vancouver the First United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, where policies and strategies were agreed to face the challenges imposed by the growing urbanizations. But since that Conference to date, the problems of the cities far from disappearing, have increased.

The process of population concentration in consolidated urban areas is more evident in the least developed countries where the population lives in informal settlements lacking proper security, with very limited access to safe drinking water and sanitation and other basic services such as education and health.

At the Millennium Summit, convened by the United Nations, Member States endorsed the Millennium Declaration whereby explicitly they expressed their commitment to promote development, to eradicate poverty, to foster human dignity and equality as well as to achieve peace and sustainability.

However, much remain to be done to achieve these goals.

Poverty spreads as global crisis and devastation caused by the impacts of climate change increase posing common challenges to all of us.

For the first time in the history of mankind, the financial, monetary, economic, food, energy and ecological crisis concur in time bringing dramatic consequences different from those previous ones. Therefore, it is imperative to urgently adopt adequate decisions, to move from words to actions, to take integrating practical actions guided by the political will of the States, the solidarity and the collaboration among different actors.

Mr. President

Our country, in spite of suffering the problems which commonly affect developing countries, has been able to establish a system of population settlements with balanced spatial and social distributions, as a clear demonstration of the importance of the role of the State in achieving development with social integration, not based on territorial competitiveness but fostering interrelations between various settlements paying attention to their peculiarities and potentialities.

The Cuban Government has made considerable efforts for gradually improve the housing units' status in the country.

The main actors in these construction plans and programs are basically the affected population assisted by their relatives, neighbors, the community, and their workplaces; with the decisive support of the State for the supply of land, projects, technical assistance, the execution of infrastructure and urbanization as well as the provision of highly subsidized raw materials –more than 60 % the actual cost- with credit facilities affordable to all families.

People's participation in these projects/plans varies according to the characteristics of the settlements. Among the most used modalities are: assisted - building by your own means and the Popular Movement to built housing, which brings together groups of neighbors in one same area who work in building new houses and in the the repairing of houses in poor conditions and have the support of various enterprises and state workplaces which provide skill labor and means for transporting the building materials.

Mr. President

The main constrain to the advance of housing programs in Cuba has been the lack of material and financial resources, aggravated by the impacts of the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America for almost half a century, which has hindered access to the markets and credits for the purchase of materials, products and technologies.

However, in September 2005, the National Assembly of the People's Power adopted a housing construction program which resulted in the construction of 250 000 new houses last year and made it possible to repair and renovate more than 760 000 housing units.

One of the main objectives of this program in the last few years has been the restoration of more than one million of damaged units – a quarter of the housing fund- and out of those 160 thousand totally destroyed by 10 high intensity hurricanes and other meteorological phenomena that occurred from 2001 to 2008. To date, it has been possible to restore more than 65% and work it is been done for the restoration of the remaining 400 thousand that were damaged and the 85 thousand totally destroyed units, especially by the three high intensity hurricanes ravaged the Island last year.

Our country's success in implementing disaster mitigation actions is clearly seen in the few human loses suffered during these events and in the increasingly expedite restoration of the vital systems.

With the ongoing construction plans we expect to finalize the full restoration of the partially damaged houses and a high percentage of the totally destroyed ones.

To achieve this, the State should further strengthen its investments in the construction materials national industry so as to increase production; to guarantee the supplies import, to provide the required means of transportation; to give necessary facilities to the construction by own means to access raw materials and products at affordable and highly subsidized prices, to strengthen technical assistance and to guarantee typological and constructive quality to better respond to future hurricane impacts.

We could not conclude without expressing our appreciation for the expressions of international solidarity extended to us by many countries here present, by UN-Habitat and its Executive Director, which in conjunction with the efforts developed by our country, allow us to continue advancing in the solution of the housing problems of our people.

Finally, we would like to express our readiness to further strengthening the collaboration, to share with those in need our experiences and modest results in the fields of human settlements, infrastructure and services affordable to all, as well as the reduction of vulnerabilities, disaster mitigation; and to contribute to the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals with all the means within our reach.

Thanks