

**Address by Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka,  
Undersecretary-General of the United  
Nations  
Executive Director of UN-HABITAT,  
on the occasion of the  
World Urban Youth Assembly  
in Rio de Janeiro, 19 March 2010.**

Mr. Eduardo Paes, Mayor of Rio de Janeiro,  
Ms. Yvonne Khamati, Deputy Permanent  
Representative of Kenya to UN-HABITAT,  
Mr. Erik Berg, Senior Advisor, Royal  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

Distinguished Members of UN-HABITAT  
Youth Advisory Board,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege and an honour for me to appear before you again at what has now rightly become the officially established World Urban Youth Assembly, held on the eve of the world's premier conference on cities every two years.

This is a great achievement! My congratulations to you all for it is thanks to your hard work and your political lobbying that has ensured the voices and messages of the youth get into the process of the World Urban Forum.

Welcome to Rio de Janeiro!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, more than half of humanity is living in towns and cities. Indeed this is an historical period when "homo sapiens" becomes 'homo urbanus'. It is projected that by 2030 that figure will rise to two-thirds.

Make no mistake, we live at a time of unprecedented, rapid, and irreversible urbanisation.

There are two other features of our new urban era. The first is that climate change is merging at the forefront of international debate. The other feature is that the global number of people living in slums and other sub-standard housing has increased by 55 million since 2000.

Did you know, for example, that more than 60 percent of Africa's urban populations, most of them young people, live in slums? That figure stands at 35 percent in South Asia, 28 percent in East Asia, 24 percent here in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the same in West Asia.

Are you aware that urban poverty is now becoming a severe, pervasive – and largely unacknowledged – feature of modern life?

That huge numbers of people in towns and cities are suffering levels of deprivation often worse than those experienced by the rural poor?

The locus of global poverty is moving to the cities. It is a process we call the urbanisation of poverty. In our view, it reflects a crisis in governance and government. We need to be able to live in cities with the democratic space that allows for the inclusion of all citizens, rich and poor, in crucial decision making processes, promoting the rule of law, law enforcement, and the protection of human rights. These are critical to a world vision based on equity and justice.

Global estimates indicate that there are more than 100 million street children around the world. Estimates show that between 700,000 and 1 million people, mostly women and girls, are trafficked around the world each

year. Youth gang membership is also estimated to be in the millions worldwide, with institutionalised youth gangs concentrated in cities with high violence rates.

The latest UN-HABITAT research we will provide at the World Urban Forum in coming days shows that unless immediate and effective interventions are made today, the urban divide that is the theme of our week here, will become a major threat to social stability, and thus to global peace and security.

I do not speak of these realities to shock you, but rather to pointedly engage your energy and passion. That is why today, I wish to impress upon you my belief in the concept of Leadership through Service.

Chanakya, a renowned thinker of ancient India, wrote, and I quote: "The leader shall

consider as good, not what pleases himself but what pleases his people." The Chinese sage Lao Tzu, in 600 BC, said: "The greatest leader forgets himself, and attends to the development of others." The Gospel of Mark quotes Jesus as saying, and I quote again: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first, must be slave of all."

In modern times, great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa have put all their energy into being of service to their fellow human beings first and above all, and from there they became the great leaders we recognize and revere.

You have these great men and women to learn from and to emulate. You have the capacity for greatness through your leadership and the chance to achieve

greatness though your service to your communities and your countries.

UN-HABITAT, the agency for the built environment, has recognized the importance of working with young people since the founding of our agency more than 30 years ago. 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 four pilot youth resource centres in cities in East Africa, and six others in countries recovering from conflict.

The world is facing an economic, environmental and social crisis not seen in almost a century. Not to forget the horrific earthquakes in Haiti and Chile.

We look to young people as agents of change which the world needs now, and I

am delighted that I see many here today who were with us at the last youth assembly in Nanjing, China two years ago.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am particularly proud of the four great strides we have taken together in direct response to your demands since Nanjing.

First, the launch of the *UN HABITAT Urban Youth Fund* thanks to the support of Norway. I am delighted to report to you today that in its first year of operation, the Fund granted close to one million US dollars to over 60 projects run by young people in 33 countries. This is a great achievement indeed!

It is my fervent hope that in this coming year, the Fund will support urban earthquake rehabilitation projects in Haiti and Chile.

We cannot, after all, fail them in this terrible hour of need.

Second, I am delighted too that we are launching here today UN-HABITAT's first world report on urban youth. Published as a special supplement to the *State of the World Cities*, the report is entitled, *Levelling the Playing Field*. I do hope that governments, civil society, private sector and youth can learn from this important work in the recognition of youth as a fundamental in the development of our towns and cities. My colleague Professor Oyebanji Oyeyinka, the principal author of this report, will shortly address you on this in greater detail.

Third, the creation of the *Interim Youth Advisory Board*. This too is something you sought so that you can engage with UN-HABITAT more closely on your concerns

and to ensure that we bring them to the global agenda.

Fourthly, the very important Resolution 22/4 voted by the countries forming the Governing Council which oversees our work as a UN agency. That resolution provides for formal and official recognition that our World Urban Youth Assembly be recognised as an integral part of the World Urban Forum.

These are great achievements indeed!

As you can see, we do hear your voices! And I hope that in this coming week you, will bring your energy and ideas to the new World Urban Campaign which I will be launching next week.

My young friends,  
This is the last occasion that I address you in my official capacity as Under Secretary

General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT. I have served two full terms at the helm of this great agency and it is now time for me to say goodbye.

In taking my leave, I ask you always to keep the legions of urban poor and their rights uppermost in your minds: that orphaned child wandering the streets; that mother carrying her water a long distance; and the young guy who so badly wants to go to school.

And so with a note of sadness and great pride, I take formal leave of you. And I say in my language, Swahili, *Kwaheri na tuta onana tena*. That means, Goodbye and we shall meet again.

Thank you – obrigada!