



United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Twenty-third Session of the Governing Council

Welcome Address

By

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- **Your Excellency, Honourable Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya,**
- **Hon. Ministers and Heads of Government Delegations,**
- **Honourable Clifford Everald Wormington, President of the 22nd Session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat,**
- **Distinguished Members of the Bureau of the 22rd Session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat,**
- **Hon. Soita Shitanda, Minister of Housing, Republic of Kenya,**
- **Ambassador Yvonne Khamati-Kilonzo, Chairperson of the CPR and its Distinguished Members,**
- **Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**
- **My Colleagues, Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, and Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, Director-General of UNON,**
- **Your Worship President of United Cities and Local Government, all Mayors and their Delegations,**
- **Representatives of other Habitat Agenda Partners, including Professional Organizations, the Private Sector and Civil Society,**
- **Distinguished Delegates,**
- **Members of the Press,**
- **Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you all to the opening of this session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat. Your Excellency, President Kibaki, we are delighted to welcome you to the United Nations Compound for the third time in less than two months. In spite of your heavy schedule, you have decided to be with us today. This is clear testimony of your personal support and of the support of the Government of Kenya to both UN-Habitat and UNEP, the two UN agencies headquartered here in Nairobi.

Mr. President,

This is the first meeting of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat since the promulgation of the new Kenyan constitution. The President as well as the Government and people of Kenya must be congratulated for this achievement. This represents a huge advancement in Kenya's political life and ushers in a bright future for the nation.

In welcoming you Mr. President, let me also thank all the Honourable Ministers, Heads of Delegations and all distinguished participants who have come from different parts of the world to attend this important session. I trust you have had a safe journey and will find your stay here comfortable and enjoyable in spite of the heavy schedule in front of you. I also hope you will find the preparations that we have made for this session satisfactory. Please do let us know if you have any complaints.

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous work carried out by members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives in preparing for this session of the Governing Council. During the last two years, the CPR has done very well in carrying out the tasks assigned to them under the

UN-Habitat rules. The able leadership of Ambassadors Macharia Kamau and Yvonne Khamati-Kilonzo, the successive Chairpersons of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, played a significant role in this.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence and support of my colleague, Mr. Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of UNEP. The level of programmatic cooperation and cordial relations between UNEP and UN-Habitat is strong. This is as it should be, confirming the wisdom of locating in Nairobi these two United Nations programmes dealing with the natural environment and the built environment – which are, indeed, two sides of the same coin.

I must also thank the Ghetto Classic Orchestra for the beautiful music we have listened to this morning. The message and symbolism of their performance today is that of hope in the midst of disadvantage and a difficult everyday life.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of a number of young actors, actresses and artists who are the new UN-Habitat Envoys for the Urban Youth. These young envoys work with UN-Habitat to promote the work and activities of our Urban Youth Programme. Thank you very much for your support and for being here today.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The present session of the Governing Council is taking place amidst significant urban trends that we can only ignore at our peril. The research of UN-Habitat in the last two years has shown that future urban policies must address four sets of major challenges that are shaping twenty-first century cities.

The first set of challenges is demographic. In this respect, several important changes are taking place all over the world, including: firstly, rapid urbanization in the developing countries of Africa and Asia, partly as a result of continuing migration from rural to urban areas; secondly, increase of the percentage of young generations in developing countries and ageing in the population pyramid of developed countries and of Eastern Europe ; and thirdly, increasing international migration, resulting in greater multi-cultural composition of cities in most parts of the world.

The second set of challenges is environmental. According to our most recent Global Report on Human Settlements, the proportion of human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions resulting from cities could be as high as 70 per cent, combining emissions related to both consumption and production. The main sources of GHG emissions from urban areas are related to the consumption of fossil fuels, mainly in the developed and rapidly developing cities. Another set of environmental challenges is the increasing frequency, intensity and impacts of natural disasters on cities. Between the 1950s and 1990s, there was a 50 per cent increase in extreme weather events associated with global warming.

The third set of challenges is socio-economic, manifested in the lack of decent jobs for a very high percentage of the urban population of developing countries, especially among the youth. In the developed world, we are also detecting an increase of inequalities in cities, with a significant

increase of very low salaries and jobless numbers, which represents a new development in the wealthy world. Migration without industrialization is also another socio-economic challenge. This is a new phenomenon in human history.

The fourth set of challenges is about the evolution of the form of the city. In many countries, cities are sprawling over the land, mostly without proper infrastructure, and at a high price to the environment. But the highest price of this evolution in both the developed and developing world is the loss of urban value. A good share of the economies of agglomeration, or economies of urbanization, is lost in this process. This is especially worrisome in developing countries because they lose the opportunity to use the city as a factor of economic growth and job creation. In addition, this evolution of the form of the city presents a common feature, which is chronic congestion on one side, and excessive consumption of energy on the other.

The good news, Mr. President, is that these challenges can be successfully addressed. There are a good number of successful cities and good practices in both the developed and the developing world that show that every one of these issues can be confronted successfully.

We need to move away from the pessimistic approach to the urban process to an optimistic point of view. The city and urban process as an asset and not as a liability. The city as a source of decent jobs and development, more equality, more opportunities for the young and more advancement of gender opportunities.

The pessimistic approach induces paralysis, while the optimistic mood promotes action towards a new set of measures, including urban planning, new simple and basic legislation, and a commitment to development and job creation. This is about returning back to basics, to pragmatic and feasible measures. It is clear that this requires a national urban policy, one that not only addresses today's problems, but presents steps for the future. We are already working in this direction, and in doing so, we believe UN-Habitat will make an important contribution.

I sincerely think that Habitat III will be the best occasion for changing the pessimistic approach to the city and for moving towards a new vision which allows the urban stakeholders to address the emerging issues, both of the developed and the developing city.

I am sure that this 23rd session of the Governing Council will open the way for renewed thinking of the urban setting, and will also help open the way to a more inclusive, equitable and properly developed city.

Thank you very much.