

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY HON. MWAI KIBAKI, C.G.H., M.P., PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 23RD SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL UN-HABITAT, UNITED NATIONS COMPLEX, GIGIRI, 11TH APRIL, 2011

Mr. Chairman,
The Executive Director, UN-HABITAT,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you for this Official Opening of the 23rd Session of the UN-HABITAT Governing Council. On behalf of the Government and People of Kenya, I warmly welcome all delegations to our country.

I note that this is the first meeting of the Governing Council since the appointment of Dr. Joan Clos as Executive Director. Allow me, therefore, to congratulate Dr. Clos on his appointment to this important position. We wish him a successful and pleasant tour of duty. I am confident that under his stewardship, UN-HABITAT will continue to serve humanity in addressing housing and urbanization challenges.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the new Director-General of the United Nations office in Nairobi Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde. We welcome you Madam Director-General and pledge our full support in your new mandate.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have gathered in Nairobi, at a time when rapid urbanization, continues to be a major challenge in most parts of the world. It is therefore appropriate that during your deliberations you will be guided by the relevant theme of "Sustainable Urban Development through Expanding Equitable Access to Land, Housing, Basic Services and Infrastructure".

Indeed, the lack of basic amenities necessary for decent human habitation, is a common phenomenon in many informal urban settlements. The problem has been worsened by the high influx of new immigrants, into our urban centers. We are now faced with the reality that, more than half of the world's population, lives in the urban areas. It is estimated that the world urban population will reach 4.2 billion by TWENTY TWENTY.

The trend is steadily increasing and by the year TWENTY FIFTY, it is projected that seventy percent of the world's population will be living in cities. This implies that every year, the world's urban population will increase by about 70 million people, which is equivalent to seven new mega cities.

Currently, a third of the world's urban population, approximately 1 billion people, lives in slums and informal settlements. The issue of rapid urbanization therefore, poses a monumental challenge. We must therefore, avoid a situation where a large proportion of the world's population, will be living in informal settlements. I therefore challenge you to engage in robust and candid discussions, and use this

opportunity to share country-specific experiences. You should draw up innovative pro-poor policies and programmes, which will address urban development issues facing our countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the case of Kenya, 32 percent of our current population of about 39 million lives in cities and towns. This is an increase from 22 percent of urban dwellers in 1999. This high rate of urbanization poses various challenges including urban poverty, inadequate transportation, unemployment and proliferation of slums and informal settlements.

My Government is committed to promoting more equitable access to land, housing, basic services and infrastructure in our cities and towns through inclusive urban development and related policies and programmes.

In order to achieve this goal, we have embarked on the implementation of our new Constitution. The constitution provides for fundamental rights and freedoms including the right to among others; housing, water, sanitation and a clean environment. We are also in the process of, establishing the National Land Commission which will uphold the above principles, as it manages all public land on behalf of the Government.

Kenya, in collaboration with UN-HABITAT and other partners will continue to implement the Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme. This aims at improving the lives of an estimated 5.4 million people living and working in informal settlements.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government has also approved a number of housing sector incentives, in order to attract participation of the private sector, in the housing delivery process particularly for low income groups.

In order to create an enabling legal framework, we have finalized the Planning and Building Bill, Housing Bill and Landlord and Tenants Bill. These Bills, upon adoption, will create a well coordinated housing and human settlements sector. This should attract investments for mass housing production.

In conclusion, you will agree with me that urbanization is here to stay. The challenge we have before us, is to manage this process and its effects. No single partner or stakeholder can address urbanization challenges alone. All stakeholders must effectively play their respective roles.

I am confident that after robust and candid discussions, the decisions made during this session will go a long way, in enhancing our collective capacity to deal with sustainable urban management challenges.

With these remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare the 23rd Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, officially open. Thank you and God Bless You.

