

Intervention at the High Level Segment - UN Habitat Governing Council. 11 April 2011

Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, hon. Liv Signe Navarsete

NORWAY

Mr President,

Let me first congratulate you and your colleagues in the Bureau with the election. I am sure that we - under your able leadership and in this beautiful Kenyan location - will bring our deliberations to a successful end. Let me also take this opportunity - somewhat late - to congratulate Dr. Juan Clos, with the appointment as Executive Director.

Urbanisation is a defining phenomenon of the 21st century. The developing world is at the centre of a demographic and economic transformation. Nearly two billion new urban residents are expected in the next 20 years. The urban populations of South Asia and Africa will double - as will the size of the world's urban built up areas. Such urbanization takes place only once and it is urgent that it develops in a sustainable and human direction.

It has been interesting to note, Mr President, how the international policy debate has evolved from the desire to *contain* urbanisation to *prepare* for it. However, we still need to address the challenges of decentralisation. Local governments need to be strengthened by both human and financial capital.

From the Norwegian side we hope that this Governing council can trigger more rational, creative and innovative action and investments to steer 21st century urban development onto a sustainable Green Economy path. Some of the principles for such development are reflected among others in the most recent Norwegian white paper launched on Friday last week on environment and development. It point out that better urban planning can contribute to a more green economy by promoting resource efficiency, reducing green gas emissions and at the same time create more productive and liveable cities. Strategic urban planning is a prerequisite for avoiding unnecessary urban sprawl, promoting energy efficient transport systems and buildings, improving solid waste management, and water and sanitation services. - In the White paper the need to harness the development potential of gender and youth is underscored.

Mr President

60 years after the UN declaration on human rights we are still far from fulfilling these basic rights. The challenges of urbanisation should be seen in this context. Better cities and good quality

housing and infrastructure is needed to secure dignified living conditions for all. Security of tenure, strengthening of local authorities and better planning practices are of utmost importance to secure the rights of the poorest of the poor.

Mr President

These are important political aims for millions and millions of people – many of them young and hoping for a better future – as they deserve. UN Habitat in cooperation with national governments can fulfil these aims. And we need to succeed. We need an effective and strong UN Habitat to cope with the challenges of urbanisation. Together we have an important job to do.

Mr President,

Gender equality must be addressed in a holistic manner. In rural areas one must look into how customary practices on property rights discriminate women in many countries. Lack of equal rights increases migration into urban areas. In designing and implementing urban policies, like slum programs, women should play a key role. Women's safety in public spaces is a precondition for sustainable urban development. Governments should look at how to empower and involve women in politics at all levels.

Mr President,

UN-Habitat has jointly with several donors, Norway being one of them, during the last months facilitated a number of independent evaluations and reviews: Global Land Tool Network, Gender Mainstreaming, the Youth Empowerment programme, the Water and Sanitation Trust Fund, ERSO and Focus Area 6: Excellence in Management.

Summed up these studies indicate that the work done at the programme level in many cases is of excellent quality. It is relevant, innovative and cost efficient. Despite limited financial resources, clear footprints of impact can be detected. The added value to the urban destitute and the poor is clear. In other words: UN Habitat *can* deliver.

Mr President,

Let us finally remind ourselves that we, the member countries, are in the end responsible for the work of the Secretariat. The way we finance the activities implemented by UN-Habitat – ear marked or non ear marked - and to what extent we are able to give relevant political guidance to the Secretariat, is crucial. But optimal organizational efficiency and effectiveness will not be achieved unless systemic constraints are addressed and resolved. This is why the governance structure of UN Habitat is of our utmost concern. The GC 23 needs to bring this issue forward in such a manner that a new governance system is in place as soon as possible. We trust the new Executive Director to take the lead in these important tasks.

We are thankful for the Kenyan hospitality and to the Kenyan government for hosting us in Nairobi.

I thank you, Mr President