

WELCOME ADDRESS by AXUMITE GEBRE-EGZIABHER

OFFICER-IN-CHARGE

UN-HABITAT

Monday 20 September 2010

46th ISOCARP Planning Congress

SUSTAINABLE CITY – DEVELOPING WORLD

Venue: UN Compound Gigiri

Nairobi, Kenya

Honourable Raila Odinga, Prime-Minister of the Republic of Kenya;

Honourable James Orengo, Minister of Lands of the Republic of Kenya;

Mr. Mairura Omwenga, Chairman of the ISOCARP Local Organizing Committee;

United Nations Colleagues;

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome you to Nairobi and to this Congress on behalf of UN-HABITAT. We are particularly pleased to see ISOCARP bringing its Congress, for the first time, to a developing country and we are delighted to co-host the Congress here at our headquarters.

The Congress will address some of the defining urban challenges of the 21st century. The quality of life of millions of people in the world is intimately connected with the way we manage, plan and govern our cities. The unfolding financial, climate, food and energy crises have underscored the urgency and gravity of the issues we are going to discuss at this conference. I commend the organizers for choosing to look at sustainable development, with a specific focus on developing world cities.

This century has already witnessed a major demographic shift, with most of the world population now living in cities. Urbanization also continues at a rapid rate, and Africa, which is the continent where urbanization is lowest, will in the next 20 years see its urban population double. In East Africa, the urban population will double in less than 10 years. In the next decades over 90% of the urban population growth will happen in developing countries.

This new urban age brings huge challenges and, at the same time, a lot of opportunities. We are entering this new era largely unprepared, through a rapid and disorderly process of urbanization, marred by poverty, inequalities, and environmental degradation.

But crisis brings with it opportunity – urbanization is a huge opportunity that can enable millions to access services and amenities, and can spur economic development as well as engender a more efficient and sustainable use of resources.

Still, this scenario is unprecedented, and not free of risks – if cities are unable to play a positive developmental role, and to respond to the needs of their inhabitants, conditions of vulnerability will increase. If we intend to continue business as usual in dealing with our cities, the climate and financial crisis remind us that the global scenario has changed and we need to deeply rethink our way of using and consuming resources. If we do not take sustainability in the economic environmental and social realms seriously, the scale of the failure will be difficult to comprehend, both at local and global levels.

We need first of all to be aware of the scenario that is unfolding.

- Firstly, we need to be aware of the speed at which urbanization is happening in the developing world. The numbers are shocking – every day, 150,000 new urban dwellers need to be housed, need access to water and services, and need to earn a living in cities.
- Secondly, rapid urbanization in developing countries is coupled with the urbanization of poverty. For millions of urban dwellers, urbanization is chaotic and brutal. In Sub-Saharan

Africa, slums host 62 per cent of the urban population. In the world, slum dwellers are close to one billion. The vast majority of these people live on less than two dollars a day.

- Thirdly, our cities mirror, in their slums and dilapidated neighbourhoods, the huge divide between rich and poor, between those who benefit from development and those who are marginalised. This gulf is an affront to human dignity. It leaves all our societies vulnerable, and each of us insecure.
- Fourthly, cities of the developing world operate to a large extent outside formal markets and sectors. Most of the new settlements and jobs are informal. To date, very few governments have been able to keep up with the urbanization process and with the demand for services and opportunities at an adequate scale. Even fewer have been able to anticipate and plan for urban growth in a way that is able to guide and manage this process.
- Finally, Climate change is now recognized as one of the most pressing global issues of our planet. It is no coincidence that global climate change has become a leading international development issue at the same time as the world has become urbanized. The way we plan, manage, operate and consume energy in our cities will have a critical role in our quest to reverse climate change and its impact. Seventy-five percent of commercial energy is consumed in urban and peri-urban areas. In addition, 80 per cent of all waste and up to 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions emanate from cities.

Cities in all parts of the world will have to make adjustments in response to climate change and resource depletion. In terms of mitigation, they will have to work towards measures designed to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. In terms of adaptation they will have to work to reduce the vulnerability of cities to the effects of climate change.

Awareness of these issues is today possibly at its highest point. The challenges of urbanizations cannot be ignored any more. They bring us back to reconsidering the fundamental assumptions of our work and approaches and have the potential of compelling us to come up with long-term innovations. The importance of a sustainable urbanization paradigm is probably also today felt as never before. The call for new ideas and a reshaping of the role of urban planning in the context of sustainable urbanization is strongest today than ever before.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The urban planning profession is in the midst of a fundamental reinvention and revival. At the 2006 World Urban Forum in Vancouver, the planning profession fraternity gathered together and resolved to reinvigorate planning in order to advance the cause of sustainable urban development. The main concern of this movement is that planning needs to be an inclusive process; that “new planning” should be innovative, context specific, embracing strategic and local integrative approaches to rural, urban and regional planning. ISOCARP has been an active actor in this reflection and the Congress series offers an extremely valuable contribution to this ongoing debate.

In welcoming the distinguished participants in the 46th ISOCARP Congress, UN-HABITAT is very interested in the substantive discussions that you will have here. From your diverse national backgrounds, and through the lenses of your urban planning experiences, we believe that the dialogue in the next few days can further shed light on how to advance a new approach to planning, governance and management that is strongly embedded within the principles of sustainability. Whichever entry point it takes, planning should enable us to see the city through the prism of sustainability.

Planning also has to persist in modernising to be fit for purpose. UN-HABITAT believes, out of its own experience, that looking at developing country issues can also help reframe many of the problems planning has been addressing in the developing world. It is not just a matter of expanding a vocabulary and a library of options, but to recognise the concrete reality of our work in this time of change.

Because of globalization, things that happen in one part of the world have impacts and implications for other parts of the world. Urban planning decisions and the success of solutions do not only depend on the local context any more, but are also influenced by the rapid transfer of ideas through the many mechanisms that have made globalization a reality. Understanding these interconnections and being aware of the triggers chains of events is therefore today a professional responsibility.

At the same time, poverty, marginalization, diversity, and the need for new models of development and a broader range of options is not a phenomenon of the global south only. Issues such as citizen participation and how to maintain lively democratic dialogue on urban development are of relevance in all regions of the world. The revitalization of urban areas and the creation of urban form beyond shopping malls and transit infrastructure, or the search for social ‘mixity’ and inclusive urban spaces is also an issue across cities all over the world. The ideas and innovations that are taking place in the global South have been, in many cases, far more creative and successful. There is therefore a need to better appraise and discuss them, as much as there is a need to tap on the experiences of other parts of the world. The example of participatory budgeting is, perhaps, one of the most well known in this respect

Despite different ways of expressing themselves, different ways of navigating their political realms, and different levels of local recognition of their work, planners in the North and in the South face fundamentally similar challenges. They are also today more interconnected and interdependent as well.

In concluding these opening remarks, I would like to indicate at least three key elements that planners need to confront and discuss in order to be able to play a significant and positive role in developing more sustainable cities.

First of all, planners have to reconsider the original objectives of planning. This will imply shifting away from objectives that predominantly relate to aesthetics, global positioning, replicating western lifestyles, to the far more demanding objectives of achieving inclusive, productive, equitable and liveable cities. Unless planning values articulate closely with the values of the society in which it is taking place, urban planning is unlikely to be socially and institutionally embedded to the extent required to be effective. At the same time, a globally and regionally connected planning involves understanding the aspirations of all global citizens and reconciling these in ways that yield effective planning solutions. The implications are potentially profound for professional ethics, for the role of national and international planning associations, for education and for the accountability of individual planners.

Secondly, the process of planning has changed dramatically in the last few decades. Technocratic approaches have given way to citizen engagement, consultation and participation. Planners have lost their exclusive control on the final output, and have today to play a much more complex role of mobilizes, brokers and conflict managers across a diversity of interests and agendas. This is not entirely new, as planners have always depended on decision makers to carry forward their proposals, but the complexity and diversity of actors involved has grown significantly. Market forces, communities and city users in general often look up to planning to provide tools and mechanisms for dialogue to happen and options to be made explicit. The urban planning system is

an important tool for governments to better manage these forces. In this, planners are no longer alone. They need to be able to play this game better, and with more adapted and effective tools.

Thirdly, planning systems (and the underpinning legislations, planning instruments or standards) are to a large extent still unaware of these important shifts – particularly in developing countries. New approaches, as they have been tried and experimented with in many cities and countries, are very often simply ‘bolted on’ as an additional and parallel process to conventional practices and regulations, leaving the underlying system to continue as usual. Where there is a clash between the norms and values driving innovative planning ideas, and those affected by such ideas, then there is a tendency to selectively ignore or use new ideas. Innovative planning ideas will only have an effect if they articulate closely with the institutional arrangements of the context in which they take place. In order to achieve this, planners need to engage more strongly in the review and reform of planning systems and leave the comfort of often outdated frameworks to chart new ways of addressing urban issues.

Indeed, these three challenges to planners, and the five crisis areas or challenges that I mentioned earlier, combined together, provide an agenda which needs to be addressed and discussed. UN-HABITAT’s own experience is that, in spite of the mismatch between available tools and needs, cities and countries constitute a rich laboratory of experiences, and have produced lessons which should be documented and discussed more widely. We hope **this conference will be one such opportunity** for cross learning and documentation.

UN-HABITAT is actively engaged in reviving planning as a potent tool for promoting sustainable urban development. We are striving with our partners in the planning fraternity to advance more highly contextualized information, new communication tools, inclusive methods for modelling outcomes, and different ways of generating solutions that support the poorest urban residents and the preservation and fostering of sustainable ecological systems.

In the preparation for this Congress, UN-HABITAT has also engaged in sharing some of its experiences – from our normative work, such as *Planning Sustainable Cities: Global Report on Human Settlements 2009*, through our post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction work in countries such as Haiti and Afghanistan, to our urban planning training tools and advocacy mechanisms such as the World Urban Campaign, which we launched in Rio de Janeiro in March this year with many partners.

We believe that only if planning explicitly expands its horizons to include and respond to the major urban challenges of the 21st century can it become the lead profession in promoting a robust and integrated response to the urban crises of today.

Certainly, these are daunting challenges and require a long-term engagement. But we should use the present crises as an opportunity to spur the world towards new directions and bolder action. Cities in many parts of the world are moving in this direction. UN-HABITAT would like to be part of this trend by joining forces with planning networks.

One thing is clear, planning in isolation is no longer enough. A spirit of solidarity is required. As the global agency which has the mandate to address issues of sustainable urban development, we stand ready to work with you.

I thank you for your kind attention.