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**MESSAGE TO THE GLOBAL MEETING  
OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITIES PROGRAMME  
AND THE LOCALIZING AGENDA 21 PROGRAMME**

26 June–1 July 2005, Havana

*Delivered by Mr. Jorge Gavidia  
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Our world is becoming more urbanized, and as the World Summit on Sustainable Development underscored, we must make sure that this urbanization is sustainable. Indeed, the success of our collective efforts for economic growth, social justice, biodiversity and climate protection depend in large measure on how well we protect and manage our urban environments.

Different regions of the world are experiencing urbanization in different ways. The Caribbean and Latin America is one of the most urbanized regions of the world, and home to several “mega cities”. It faces real difficulties in meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of its urban population. Sub-Saharan Africa, by contrast, is the least urbanized region on earth. But its people are moving to urban areas faster than anywhere else, in an environment of weak economic growth. As a result, some of its cities are doubling in size in as little as 15 years, leading to a proliferation of large informal settlements and slums. In Asia, a slightly larger proportion of the population is urbanized, and there, too, rapid urbanization is causing an expansion in unplanned slum areas.

Dealing with these urban challenges is especially important in light of the efforts of Member States to achieve the targets set out in the Millennium Declaration. In September this year, heads of state and government will gather in New York for the World Summit. They will be reviewing progress made in the past five years in eradicating absolute poverty and hunger and reducing by half the number of people living on less than one dollar per day. They will also be assessing the degree to which governments, community-based organizations, and the private sector have succeeded in “improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers” – a key indicator of sustainable urbanization. But the Summit must be about more than assessment. It must lead to a major boost for development efforts from both developing countries and their development partners.

In the run up to the Summit, this Global Meeting is an important opportunity to focus on the “cities without slums” target, along with the environmental sustainability targets related to water and sanitation. In addition to assessing progress made, this meeting is also a chance to promote innovative approaches to sustainable urbanization -- approaches based on strengthening good governance through participatory and inclusive management of our cities and towns.

I am delighted to learn in this context of Cuba's important work to develop secondary cities and improve poor neighborhoods. The rehabilitation of Old Havana was recognized by UN-HABITAT as a best practice in 2000. Cuba's experiences, along with those of other countries represented at this meeting, should be shared for the benefit of all. In that spirit, please accept my best wishes for success in your deliberations.