



UN-HABITAT

STATEMENT BY
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On the occasion of
THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF UNITED
CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
(UCLG)

Paris, 2 May 2004

***Your Excellencies,
Your Worships Mayors and local leaders,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

The creation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) reflects the commitment of the world's mayors to create a unified global voice for cities, convinced that the challenges of a rapidly globalizing and urbanizing world need to be addressed at the local level by the sphere of government, which is closest to the citizens.

This commitment was made at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements – HABITAT II, in 1996, which adopted the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda and underlined the importance of developing strategic partnerships between national governments and local authorities.

Since the City Summit, it has been widely recognized that local authorities are the closest partners of Governments in promoting sustainable urban development.

Let me take this opportunity on behalf UN-HABITAT to congratulate you all, mayors and local leaders from around the world, on this initiative of great relevance.

UN-HABITAT has developed extensive relations with mayors and local leaders and their associations during the last ten years. This collaboration gathered a special momentum with the establishment of the UN Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA) in January 2000, and the holding of the Special Session of the General Assembly on Istanbul + 5, in June 2001.

We welcome the creation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). We have strongly supported this process since 1994 and have no doubt that the leadership of this new world organisation of Local Authorities will work closely with UN-HABITAT's and the United Nations to strengthen the role of local authorities both at the national and international levels.

I wish to reiterate what the Secretary-General has stressed in his message to this Founding Congress: "the United Nations General Assembly recently decided that local authorities will participate in the deliberations of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT, which is the UN focal point for Local Governments to strengthen its partnerships with governments in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals". This rule 64 of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT represents a real breakthrough in the relations between the UN and local authorities.

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For more than a decade, UN-HABITAT's cooperation with local authorities has been carried out in various areas, including at the operational, political, normative, institutional, monitoring and implementation levels.

At the operational level, UN-HABITAT has developed many activities in towns and cities, mostly in developing countries (Africa, Latin America and Asia), addressing the needs of local authorities in terms of capacity-building, urban policy reform,

environmental planning, monitoring, housing and slum upgrading programmes, water and sanitation, infrastructure etc.

UN-HABITAT has played a major role in post-conflict urban rehabilitation, including through the re-establishment and training of local authorities in countries such as Somalia, Kosovo or Afghanistan. This understanding of the capacities and needs of local authorities constitutes a solid reference basis and also a testing ground for UN-HABITAT's normative work and policy guidelines. We have strengthened our links with all Habitat Agenda partners, in particular local leaders and their communities through programmes such as "City-to-city cooperation", "Best Practices", "Cities Alliance" in partnership with the World Bank, the "Urban Management Programme" in partnership with UNDP, and the "Sustainable Cities Programme" in partnership with UNEP.

At the political level, since 1996 and the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration, our efforts have focused on strengthening the role and international status of local authorities. The Governing Council of UN-HABITAT therefore adopted resolution 17/18 in 1999, which requested UN-HABITAT to establish a committee of local authorities as an advisory body that would serve the purpose of strengthening the dialogue with local authorities from all over the world involved in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA) was established in January 2000, under the Chairmanship of Mayor Joan Clos of Barcelona, to whom I should like to extend my sincere gratitude for an excellent collaboration. UNACLA, which is composed of Mayors and Presidents of local authority associations has been instrumental for having the presence of local authorities acknowledged in the international arena and defining a positive and innovative vision of the future of the world cities. It has significantly contributed to the definition and implementation of the Global Campaigns on Secure Tenure and Good Urban Governance initiated and co-ordinated by UN-HABITAT.

The establishment of UNACLA has been recognised and welcomed by various resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, including resolution 56/206 of 21 December 2001, which upgraded the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements into UN-HABITAT. UNACLA has also served as interface between the world of local Authorities and national governments at the international level, through a systematic global dialogue on the promotion of representative and participatory democracy. Considering new developments in the partnership between the United Nations and cities and associations of local governments since the establishment of UNACLA, I am committed to intensify and expand the work of the Committee in order to have a greater impact in empowering local authorities.

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In 1996, the Habitat Agenda in its paragraph 177 endorsed the principle of subsidiarity. The Governing Council of UN-HABITAT recently referred to it as the underlying rationale to the process of decentralization and noted: "according to this

principle, public responsibilities shall be exercised by those authorities which are closest to the citizens”.

UN-HABITAT’s efforts to support and strengthen the role of local authorities have focused on promoting decentralization in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Key milestones in these efforts have included: (i) a draft World Charter of local self-government presented by UN-HABITAT in collaboration with WACLAC (1998 – 2000), (ii) the Global Campaign on Urban Governance launched by UN-HABITAT in 1999, (iii) resolution 18/11 of the Commission on Human Settlements, which requested to intensify dialogue among governments at all levels on effective decentralisation and the strengthening of local authorities, (iv) dialogue sessions on decentralization during the first session of the World Urban Forum and at the nineteenth session of the Governing Council, (v) resolution 19/12 of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT, which requested to establish a high-level Advisory Group of Experts on Decentralization (AGRED) to guide the international dialogue on decentralization and to provide further advice on strengthening the status and role of local authorities.

The first meeting of AGRED took place on 9 – 10 March 2004 in Gatineau, Canada. The proceedings and report of the inaugural meeting of AGRED have been posted on the UNACLA web page: [http://www.un-habitat.org/unacla/](http://www.un-habitat.org/unaccla/).

AGRED’s members include experts from Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Egypt, India, Norway, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and a representative of Metropolis on behalf of United Cities and Local Governments.

AGRED will develop recommendations, document best practices and support the international dialogue on decentralization. The Group will contribute to the identification of international principles of decentralization through reviewing relevant international legal instruments, including national legislation, regulations and practices of decentralization.

As you will notice, UN-HABITAT is committed to intensifying efforts of collaboration with local authorities and their associations. In this connection, in order to strengthen our monitoring mechanisms, I am most pleased to announce today the creation of a Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD) as a “watchdog” of good urban governance and decentralization.

GOLD will be officially launched at the World Urban Forum II in Barcelona on 17 September 2004 during a dialogue session jointly organized by UCLG and UN-HABITAT. It will take advantage of the work of the Global Urban Observatory (GUO) and make use of the Urban Governance Index developed by the Governance Campaign.

Once established, GOLD will contribute to the Campaign on Urban Governance. It will make full use of UCLG networks with the aim to: (i) provide regular feed-back on progress made globally in the context of Local Democracy and Decentralisation; (ii) undertake comparative analyses of the collected data, develop indicators and publish recommendations on a biennial basis; (iii) submit a biennial report to the World Urban Forum to document progress made.

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Our work at UN-HABITAT is focused on reducing urban poverty through collaboration with Governments and local authorities. This is based on the commitments made by Governments at the Millennium Summit in September 2000.

As you are aware, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals require national and international efforts to create a living environment which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty. Indeed, the MDGs will only be achieved through concerted efforts by societies, institutions, and governments at all levels pulling together in the same direction. However, the main challenge remains to focus on local situations and conditions. Success in the implementation of the millennium development goals will depend on the ownership at the city level.

Cities, metropolitan-regions and other human settlements are our greatest potential. They possess immense capacities as partners in development to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of live for citizens. But, realizing this potential requires a new understanding of partnership that promotes efficiency, resourcefulness, and creativity.

Indeed, the MDGs have become the ‘organizing framework’ for many multi and bilateral development programmes and agencies. No matter which approach is privileged in the implementation of the MDGs, at UN-HABITAT we believe that this framework for development must always recognize the “local” dimensions. The achievement of the MDGs may be difficult if local authorities do not begin now to take determined and concerted action to articulate and address the needs of the urban poor.

UN-HABITAT’s strategy in the achievement of target 10: “halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water”, and target 11: “achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers”, focuses on 3 major pillars: (i) Monitoring and evaluation to generate and manage information and knowledge (flagship reports); (ii) the Global Campaigns on Secure Tenure and Urban Governance to carry out advocacy actions and provide policy guidance; (iii) Technical cooperation to provide advisory services and capacity building.

On this basis, UN-HABITAT has been supporting a number of cities through 2 regional programmes: Water for African cities and Water for Asian cities. We have also designed a number of large-scale slum upgrading projects, as leading Agency of the Cities Alliance initiative (in cooperation with the World Bank), which are at the implementation stage.

UN-HABITAT and UNDP are preparing a programme called “Urban Millennium Partnership – Localizing MDGs”. This programme will support local authorities in the implementation of the MDGs and the empowerment of local governance systems.

As you can notice, our approach to the MDGs involves constructive inter-agency collaboration with key international institutions. This is why our collaboration with UCLG will not only be important, but essential in the years to come.

I wish UCLG full success.

