



## Foreword



With more than half of the world's population now living in urban areas, this is the urban century. Harmonious urbanization, the theme of this fourth edition of the State of the World's Cities, has never been more important.

Cities embody some of society's most pressing challenges, from pollution and disease to unemployment and lack of adequate shelter. But cities are also venues where rapid, dramatic change is not just possible but expected. Thus they present real opportunities for increasing energy efficiency, reducing disparities in development and improving living conditions in general. National and local governments can promote harmonious urbanization by supporting pro-poor, inclusive and equitable urban development and by strengthening urban governance structures and processes. History demonstrates that integrated urban policy can be a solid path towards development.

Contrary to popular opinion, inequality and the unsustainable use of energy are not inevitable aspects of urban development, nor are they necessary for urbanization and economic growth to occur. Rather, as this report illustrates, cities can advance the prosperity of their inhabitants while achieving equitable social outcomes and fostering the sustainable use of resources. Today, many small, well-managed cities in both the developing and developed worlds are enjoying rapid growth, giving us a chance to stave off entrenched poverty and cultivate healthy environments in which people can thrive.

The data and analysis contained in this report are intended to improve our understanding of how cities function and what we, as a global community, can do to increase their liveability and unity. In that spirit, I commend this report to policymakers, mayors, citizens' groups and all those concerned with the welfare of our urbanizing world.

Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary-General  
United Nations

