

"Embargoed until Monday, 4 October 2004"

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

MESSAGE ON WORLD HABITAT DAY

4 October 2004

The theme of World Habitat Day this year, *Cities – engines of rural development*, was chosen to remind development policy-makers at every level not to think of “urban” and “rural” as separate entities, but rather as parts of an economic and social whole.

Cities interact with rural areas in many ways. Migrants living and working in cities send money to families in rural areas. Cities absorb excess rural populations, and offer markets for farm produce and other rural products. They provide services and amenities -- such as universities and hospitals – that may not be available or feasible in rural areas. Cities are also the locus of most global investment, raising demand for goods, labour and other inputs from rural areas.

In the next 25 years, virtually all population growth will take place in the world’s cities, most of it in the cities of developing countries. The fastest growing cities will be secondary and market towns, which are especially close to rural areas. This growth can help to improve rural life and ease the problems associated with mega-cities. But to do so, it will need to be well-managed, with significant investments in communication, transport channels and other infrastructure, and with concerted efforts to ensure that all people have access to adequate services.

While there are obvious differences between urban and rural development that require different interventions, ultimately sustainable development cannot and should not focus exclusively on one or the other. On this World Habitat Day, let us recognize that cities have a crucial contribution to make to rural development, and let us pursue development in a comprehensive way that reflects that understanding.