



**2011 Gwangju Summit of the Urban Environmental  
Accords**

**Keynote Address**

**Sustainable urban development priorities and strategies**

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**Honourable Kang Un-tae, Mayor of Gwangju Metropolitan City**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Honourable Ministers and Mayors,**

**Distinguished Delegates,**

**My Colleague Amina Mohamed , Deputy Executive Director of UNEP,**

**UN Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

*Annyoung-haseyo, yeo-ro-boon* (Good morning, everyone)!

It is a pleasure and a privilege for me to be with you today to address the Gwangju Summit of the Urban Environmental Accords.

I am happy to be in Korea this week, a country that has taken a lead in “walking the talk” on sustainable urbanization and climate change issues, combining efforts of local government, the private sector and academia. This great country harbours many shining examples of sustainable, inclusive, green and welcoming cities. If all cities were to follow in the footsteps of Korean Mayors, there would perhaps not be so many worries about the feasibility of reaching significant cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

I am sure that Korean cities are scoring highly with regards to the implementation of the **21 Urban Environment Accords** that were adopted in San Francisco in 2005. As you are aware, these Accords call upon Mayors to take urgent action on energy, waste reduction, urban design, urban nature, transportation, environmental health and water. Several of these accords are together to achieve certain results by June next year, coinciding with the Rio+20 Conference.

Therefore it is very timely for the Gwangju Summit to take stock of progress and provide added impetus to the implementation of these Accords.

## **Rapid urbanisation**

### ***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

For my address today I would like to take a 'wide angle focus' on the discussion of **sustainable urbanization and climate change**.

Rapid urbanization is happening, and it is occurring largely in developing countries where a massive demographic shift has enormous implications in terms of poverty, natural resources and the environment. In the coming decades, the developing countries will be responsible for 95 per cent of the world's urban population growth. An average growth of 5 million new urban residents per month is projected for cities in the developing world.

Levels of urbanization are expected to rise, with the least urbanized regions of Asia and Africa transforming from largely rural societies to predominantly urban regions during the course of this century. By 2050, it is predicted that the urban population of the developing world will be 5.3 billion; Asia alone will host 63 per cent of the world's urban population, or 3.3 billion people.

## **International perspective on urban environment**

The ecological interaction of cities and their hinterlands is a recurring theme. Rapid urbanization and climate change have given it a new impetus and sense of urgency. Way back in 1976, the Habitat conference in its plan of action stated:

*"... expected population growth and migration mean that urban expansion will be the most common and universal development challenge. However, urban expansion can take the form of urban sprawl, it is then costly, wasteful and ecologically destructive."*

Later at the Rio Summit in 1992, Chapter 7 of Agenda 21 explicitly addressed the issue and introduced the concept of sustainable human settlements for the first time. It stated that

*"... urbanization if properly managed offers unique opportunities for the supply of sustainable environmental infrastructure through adequate pricing policies, educational programmes and access mechanisms that are economically and environmentally sound."*

At the Habitat II conference in 1996, the international community underscored in the Habitat Agenda the need for new approaches to planning and managing rapid urban growth and human settlements. These and other debates advanced the notion of "**sustainable urbanization**" to help unpack the complex processes of urbanization and the symbiotic relations between the urban and rural settlements.

We have come a long way on the debate and discourse of these issues. But the challenges are complex and daunting, and require continuous engagement and effort at all levels. The upcoming Rio+20 Summit will give us an opportunity to restate the importance of sustainable urban development as a precondition for sustainable development.

## **Cities and Climate Change**

The climate change phenomenon is making the issue of sustainable urbanization a matter of urgency.

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 per cent of commercial energy is consumed in urban and peri-urban areas. In addition, 80 per cent of all waste is generated from cities and up to 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions which cause global climate change emanate from cities.

There have been warnings that the sea level is rising twice as fast as was forecasted, threatening two hundred million people living in deltas, low-lying areas and small island states. But the threat of sea-level rise to cities is only one piece of the puzzle. More extreme weather patterns associated with climate change, such as intense storms, are another. Tropical cyclones and storms, in the past two years alone, have affected some 120 million people around the world, mostly in developing and least developed countries. Indeed, in some parts of the world, inland flooding is occurring more often and on a more intense basis.

Also, we are witnessing more frequent flooding and drought in the same year, causing heavy impacts on food security, energy and water supply. These are practically constant occurrences for many of the world's less fortunate people who live under life-threatening conditions in slums. For them, the climate is already out of control and, perhaps equally important, out of comprehension.

Therefore, there is no doubt that climate change exacerbates existing social, economic and environmental problems, while bringing on new challenges. The most affected today, and in future, will be the world's urban poor – and chief among them, the estimated 1 billion slum dwellers.

## **The role of cities in adaptation**

Cities can adapt to the impacts of climate change through effective urban management. Planning and land use controls can prevent people from building in zones at risk of flooding and landslides. Guidelines and regulations to encourage cyclone-resistant building practices can increase resiliency and make economic sense.

However, we also know that many cities in least developed countries do not have much urban infrastructure assets that can be adapted. Therefore, adaptation cannot be disconnected from the need for local development. Both adaptation and mitigation strategies in urban areas require new and **improved infrastructure and basic services**. This provides cities in developed and developing countries with unique opportunities to redress existing deficiencies in housing, urban infrastructure and services. This also provides new opportunities to create jobs and to stimulate the urban economy, and also contribute to climate change adaptation.

## **The role of cities in mitigation**

***Ladies and gentlemen,***

We all agree that urban climate change **mitigation** measures are urgently required. However, and to date, the measures we envisage at the global and national levels have yet to be accompanied by concerted measures at the city and local levels.

While we fine-tune carbon trading instruments, we need to take immediate actions to make our cities more sustainable by revisiting our land-use plans, our transport modalities, and our building designs.

There is a unique opportunity to bridge our global efforts in emissions control with local efforts to improve the quality of life and the productivity of our cities. Our cities are, after all, the driving force of our economies, and what better measures can we take than to reduce traffic congestion, improve air and water quality, and reduce our ecological footprint in order to guarantee better lives?

Climate change mitigation can be a good business opportunity. Clean, low-carbon infrastructure investments, retrofitting of buildings, and the renewal of our transport systems are all opportunities for 'green' investment. According to the estimates of international associations of local governments, already more than 3000 cities have committed themselves to reducing their annual GHG emissions, or meeting other targets for more sustainable urban development. While most of these cities are in the Global North, some in the South are taking specific measures to reduce urban emissions. These include construction of urban wastewater methane gas capture projects, energy efficiency audits of municipal buildings, and development of mass transport systems to reduce the use of single occupancy vehicles.

What strikes me in particular is the resolve with which many cities have stuck to their climate action despite the current economic crisis. They remain convinced that climate change action makes economic sense. For example, increased energy efficiency is not only good for the climate, but also makes sense for a city's budget. As former U.S. president Bill Clinton said: "For every 1 billion US dollars invested in the retrofitting of houses to increase their energy efficiency, 6000 jobs are created. This is six times bigger in impact than in average public investments. And

what is more: savings in energy will pay back for this investment in just over 7 years".

## **UN-HABITAT's response**

### ***Distinguished delegates,***

We are convinced that the following points are critical to achieve more sustainable urban development: 1) elaboration of national urban strategies and policy – often, member States have national housing policy, but what is mostly needed is comprehensive urban policy; 2) promotion of sound urban patterns in regions surrounding cities – we found that cities are planned, but not its perimeters, and urban planning/design is more required in the metropolitan areas; 3) improvement of urban slums; 4) job creation for economic and social development – there is a massive rural immigration phenomenon as people move to cities looking for job, but often no job is available in cities, which causes increase of slum-dwellers and related issues; 5) establishment of legal frameworks to guarantee safety and sustainability; 6) promotion of sound urban energy and urban mobility patterns – poor cities have same congestion and traffic jams, and urban planning is the key; and 7) strengthening of local governance in order to increase the financial capacity of cities to sustain infrastructure and basic services.

In this way, sustainable urbanization can provide one of the key unifying forces to ensure coherence between sectoral policies such as promoting energy efficiency, water demand and quality management, mobility, waste management, biodiversity protection, natural disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation.

I am glad to inform you that, within UN-Habitat, we are vigorously responding to these challenges.

One of our new top programme priorities at present is promoting a new way of **urban planning and urban design**. In recent

years, there has been a realization that urban planning in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, is not equipped to deal with current urban challenges.

In promoting new urban planning, UN-Habitat has turned its focus to prevention of both slums and urban sprawl. And we are also promoting improved access to basic urban services, including sustainable water and sanitation, energy and transport.

The new approach that we are promoting emphasises: (1) preventive planning – planning in advance; (2) planning at the scale of the problems; and (3) planning in phases, beginning with ensuring adequate physical access and basic urban services, especially water and sanitation.

Further areas of emphasis within our current programmatic work include **strengthening of local institutions, governance and legislation**. We are also promoting the **economic role of cities**. Green growth, creation of jobs and delivery of basic urban services all require robust, effective and efficient local authorities.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation at the urban level is another top priority. In direct response to the need for capacity development in the area of climate change, our **Cities in Climate Change Initiative** is, since 2008, supporting the efforts of government agencies and local authorities in adopting more holistic and participatory approaches to urban environmental planning and management, and the harnessing of ecologically sound technologies.

The Cities in Climate Change Initiative is guided by the principle that both adaptation and mitigation require similar measures, to a large extent, namely better land use planning, better urban management, more participatory governance focusing on more resilient housing and smarter infrastructure and basic services.

Our work with cities has also demonstrated that cities are facing serious obstacles in accessing Climate Change financing

mechanisms to support their initiatives. I hope that this Summit will critically look at the current bottlenecks and propose measures to enhance predictable financial support to accelerate action.

The Cities in Climate Change Initiative is currently working with 20 developing countries. We are exploring collaboration with the Korean International Cooperation Agency (**KOICA**), who have expressed an interest in contributing to further work with Asian cities.

I am also glad to inform you that UN-Habitat has just launched its **2011 Global Report on Human Settlements**, titled ***Cities and Climate Change***. This report identifies promising mitigation and adaptation measures that are supportive of more sustainable and resilient urban development paths. It was launched during the session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council in early April this year and its title was also the theme of our World Habitat Day earlier this month.

In partnership with the Cities Alliance, the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme, we are refining methods to support cities to measure their climate footprint and assess their climate change vulnerability. These metrics should assist cities in accessing climate related finance.

These two themes – **metrics and finance** – are high on the agenda of this Summit. The discussions you will have this week on “Measuring Urban Environmental Performance”, and on “Financing Urban Climate Change Action” are of immediate relevance to our work. So I very much look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

There are some encouraging signs that the international community is beginning to pay attention to the needs of cities and local governments. At the close of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC in Cancún (COP-16), States recognized local

governments as key “governmental stakeholders” in global climate change efforts.

However, more needs to be done, particularly regarding **climate change finance**. Decision-makers at COP-17 in Durban should provide cities and local governments with **direct access** to a portion of resources that will be channelled through the Green Climate Fund. Likewise administrators of bi-lateral climate funds should consider cost-effective actions that **benefit the urban poor** to be strategic funding priorities, and encourage local governments to apply directly for such funds.

## **Collaboration between UN-HABITAT and UNEP**

### ***Distinguished delegates,***

In the context of this Summit, I wish to inform you that I am delighted with the level of cooperation and cordial relations between UNEP and UN-HABITAT, the two United Nations programmes dealing with the natural environment and the built environment, respectively.

Our current **Partnership Framework** has pushed cooperation between UN-Habitat and UNEP to new heights. One of the aims of the Partnership is to strengthen the capacity of cities to assess and prioritize local environmental concerns. Another aim is to strengthen the capacity of cities and their stakeholders to participate effectively in national and global environmental debates.

We hope to further develop this collaboration in the coming years through joint work on Sustainable Mobility and on Sustainable Buildings. We are especially interested in how we can make the green economy and the right to development compatible.

## Learning and knowledge management

### ***Ladies and gentlemen:***

A sustainable city must be a learning city which is continuously exploring and innovating, sharing and networking. Recognizing this potential, UN-HABITAT, has launched the World Urban Campaign to harness and channel knowledge, expertise and experience in support of sustainable urbanisation.

In this regard, we are proud to be associated with the **International Urban Training Center** hosted by Gangwon Province. It is a source of innovation and an opportunity for learning about sustainable urban development options. We see great potential for this Center as it broadens its programmes and expands its reach.

### ***Distinguished delegates,***

In closing, may I take this opportunity to invite you all to the **Sixth Session of the World Urban Forum** to be held in Naples, Italy in September 2012. At the World Urban Forum the world converges to dialogue and exchange ideas on the urban challenges of our time.

Finally, I would like to stress that the challenges facing cities are numerous and daunting, and no entity, public or private, governmental or non-governmental, academic or practitioner, can face these challenges alone. I welcome all those who are committed to turning ideas into action to join us in our quest for more sustainable urban development.

I wish you all a most successful Summit and I thank you for your kind attention.

*Kamsa-hamnida* (Thanks).