

**STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UN-HABITAT
MRS. ANNA KAJUMULO TIBAIJUKA
UNITED NATIONS HOUSE
BEIRUT, LEBANON, 4 JUNE 2004**

Honourable Minister,
Distinguished guests,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour to be here with you today on my first visit to Lebanon. The excellent and warm hospitality that I have witnessed since my arrival is only paralleled by the dynamism I have seen in all aspects of daily life and the numerous achievements in urban renewal, housing construction and local economic development. The reconstruction of Beirut and of Lebanon, in such a short period of time, is nothing short of impressive. Like a Phoenix from the ashes, it demonstrates that where there is a will there is a way. Similarly, in Deir El Ahmar in the Beka'a Valley, I have learned of another successful initiative involving grassroots women, many of them widows, who have restored their livelihoods by forming a co-operative to produce organic foodstuffs for local consumption as well as for export. These initiatives, at the opposite ends of the human settlements spectrum, are a testimony to the visionary leadership of this country and the will of its people to improve their living conditions on a sustainable basis. Both these initiatives have been documented and recognised by UN-HABITAT, with the women's initiative in Deir El Ahmar having won the Dubai International Award for Best Practices in 2002.

More importantly, however, they provide us with lessons that are of utmost relevance to the region. The two burning questions that all people are asking in this region, and indeed throughout the world, are how to ensure peace and security, and how to overcome the devastating impact of war and occupation. Although I have no ready answer to the first question, it is my firm belief that the only way forward is to be found in the multilateral machinery of the United Nations.

Regarding the second question I would like to share with you some insights from UN-HABITAT's experience.

As you are aware, UN-HABITAT was heavily involved in the Oil-For-Food programme. For seven years, we were charged with the task of building houses and providing basic infrastructure and services in Northern Iraq. During that time, we were successful in helping to establish a system for the comprehensive construction of housing, roads, bridges, water and sanitation, schools, clinics, community centres and other social and economic facilities. Our operations, totalling over US\$ 500 million in investments, benefited 1.4 million people representing 40 percent of the population of Northern Iraq. More importantly, however, the Resettlement Rehabilitation Programme worked extensively with small and medium size contractors and helped create some 80,000 jobs and a vibrant construction sector. By its very nature, the Settlement Rehabilitation Programme required close co-operation between UN-HABITAT and local authorities. Although the rules of the game did not allow us, or the United Nations, to engage in development work *per se*, we would not have been able to achieve these results without working closely with local authorities and civil society every step of the way. The strategy we used was an informal capacity-building approach whereby we engaged

government and community leaders in all aspects of policy-making, data collection and analysis, project planning and formulation, construction management and quality control. This “partnership approach” enabled us to mainstream many cross cutting issues such as gender equality and social inclusion. It provided a channel for people to voice their opinions and to engage in meaningful dialogue to determine their needs and priorities. It also proved to be extremely useful when the Security Council adopted Resolution 1483, removing the legal impediments to local authority capacity building. We were able to launch, within a short time frame, a major programme focusing on building capacity in such areas as urban planning, project management, contracting and tendering, and operations and maintenance. Our experience shows that it is indeed possible and desirable to build a bridge between relief and reconstruction - from providing for basic needs to empowering people and giving them a stake and sense of ownership in the building of their communities.

Since the handover, we have been continuing our efforts to ensure that the accumulated knowledge, expertise and experience are not lost. We have maintained a team in Amman, working closely with the UN Team, a presence in Kuwait and a core group of nationals in Iraq. We are members of the Executive Committee where we serve as the deputy task manager of the Infrastructure and Housing cluster and are actively involved in five of the ten other clusters. We adopted establishing a strategy for the reconstruction of Iraq. Last but not least, we initiated and established the High-Level Advisory Panel for the Reconstruction of Iraq. The purpose of this panel is to ensure maximum Iraqi ownership of future reconstruction projects and programmes. This Panel has met three times and approved just recently in May a four-year US\$ 369 million Urban and Housing Rehabilitation Programme. These efforts have also resulted in a first allocation of US\$ 5.6 million seed funding by the United Nations Development Group towards the formulation of an Iraqi Shelter Policy.

There is no doubt in my mind that peace in the region depends ultimately on a just solution to the Palestinian question. This was recognised by the Governing Council on Human Settlements in Resolution 19/18 calling on UN-HABITAT to establish a Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian people and a Technical Cooperation Trust Fund. My report to the 10th session of Governing Council underlined the deplorable conditions of human settlements in the occupied territories. As a result, the Resolution appealed for urgent action to help alleviate overcrowding and the dire shortage of housing and basic urban services. Our approach in Palestine is to build the requisite capacity and help establish a housing policy and delivery system. This includes a system for surveying housing stock, establishing a housing registration system, land use planning, environmental management and other key human settlements functions, such as housing finance, that will enable the Palestinian people to benefit from essential infrastructure and basic services. In March this year, I appointed Mr. Abdalla Abbas, who is with us today, as the Programme Coordinator, together with a Chief Technical Advisor located in Jerusalem, and a Programme Manager located in Gaza. I am also happy to report that our appeal for support has not gone unheeded. To date, we have received close to US\$ 1 million to begin the first phase of operations. This first phase will involve intense consultations with the Palestinian Authority to define a set of priority actions by December 2004, and a concerted fund-raising effort to begin programme implementation in January 2005.

Your Excellency, distinguished guests, what are some of the lessons learned from these and other experiences?

The first and most important lesson is to view humanitarian relief as an integral part of a longer-term development agenda. The strategic objectives of the *Habitat Agenda* stress the

importance of partnerships, participation, capacity building, gender equality and the use of networking and information in decision making. Our experience in Iraq and Palestine has shown that these are valid entry points. In Iraq, we not only handed over a complete set of housing, infrastructure and services, but also a cadre of trained personnel as a basis for a sustainable reconstruction process. We also established a wide range of databases and rosters on contractors, small and medium size businesses, sources of local expertise and of procurement and services. In Palestine, our focus is very similar. The key objectives of our partnership with the Palestinian Authority will be on an integrated approach to housing, building and planning, not only to help overcome the tremendous deficit in these areas, but also to build a lasting institutional framework and capacity for policy development and implementation.

The second lesson I believe is the importance of working with civil society. In the final analysis, it is the presence of strong and vibrant social capital that will enable people and their communities to overcome the devastation of war and conflict. UN-HABITAT's approach to housing and urban development is predicated on the principles of people-centred development. This is the corner stone of real and meaningful democracy where social inclusion and justice are the priorities of government and governance. People must have an effective voice in decisions that affect their daily livelihoods and well-being and this is only possible if they are empowered in social, economic and political terms. Our experiences in the region, and elsewhere, provide ample evidence that participatory democracy is an essential complement to representative democracy and to meeting the needs of the majority, namely the urban poor.

Last but not least, it is imperative that we inform our decisions and actions on information. Our experiences in Iraq, Palestine and many other countries in the region underline the importance of establishing and maintaining a comprehensive system of key indicators and lessons learned from experience. In the realm of indicators, we are working closely with ESCWA and other institutions throughout the Mashrek region to establish urban observatories, to collect, analyse and inform people, communities, local authorities and governments in the formulation and adoption of more effective human settlement policies and strategies. Similarly, we are blessed with a long-standing partnership with Dubai Municipality to identify, document and disseminate examples of best practices to provide an empirical base for decision makers, at all levels, with the compelling evidence of what works and to promote the exchange and transfer of lessons learned from experience. Our recently opened information office in Kuwait further strengthens a growing network of national and regional partners to promote the exchange of experience and lessons learned from good policies, effective strategies and best practice.

We are also working with ESCWA in preparing for the launch of our twin campaigns on Urban Governance and Security of Tenure as an entry point to attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Given the fact that the majority of the people in this region are living in cities, meeting the Millennium Development Goals and their targets of poverty reduction, universal access to health and education, and improving the living conditions of slum dwellers can be most effectively met on a sustainable basis by fostering a robust housing and construction sector and in the delivery of urban basic urban services.

The first major activity was held in Cairo in December 2003, bringing together a cross-section of experts and professionals from the entire region to set the agenda for the launch of the twin campaigns in the Arab States. Follow-up activities include high level dialogues and conference in July and October later this year, the establishment of a regional consultative group, the strengthening of local urban observatories and continuing research and documentation of policies, strategies and best practices.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to announce that “Lebanon Rebuilt” has been entered for possible award for this year’s Habitat Scroll of Honour, as an outstanding example of what can be achieved through the relentless effort of its people. As we celebrate today the achievements of the reconstruction of Lebanon, let us also pray for peace and security in the region.

Thank you.