



STATEMENT BY  
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*On the occasion of*  
**The IV<sup>th</sup> Forum of Local Authorities for Social  
Inclusion of Porto Alegre**

Barcelona, 7 May 2004

*Dear Mayors and friends,*

I am very glad that I was able to join you this morning for the opening ceremony of the 4<sup>th</sup> Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion of Porto Alegre, taking place just before the official opening of the 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures. I am also particularly happy to continue with you, here in Barcelona, the outstanding momentum of the founding Congress of United Cities and Local Governments that took place this week in Paris.

As you are aware, improving social inclusion is at the very core of UN-HABITAT agenda and we strongly believe and advocate that city and local authorities play the most important role in tackling this global challenge. Local authorities have the essential responsibility for developing integrated local policies and strategies to operationalise and complete national and regional frameworks for poverty reduction. Local authorities also have the responsibility to build local consensus, to mobilise and coordinate other local stakeholders.

In this beautiful city of Barcelona and in most European cities, social inclusion has been a priority for decades and most regions of the world can learn from your approaches and from your policies and practices. But unfortunately, in this matter, progress can be accounted but the work will never end. Attention should be permanently maintained to avoid new exclusions in our changing world. In particular, we all know that global economic competition increases the marginalisation of vulnerable groups if social exclusion is not adequately addressed at local levels.

Allow me today to concentrate my message on the disadvantaged parts of our world. In my capacity of UN-HABITAT Executive Director but also as a native from a developing country, I would like to add my advocating voice to those of our fellow citizens living on the fringes and in the poorest neighbourhoods of towns and cities across Africa, the Arab States, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

In October 2003, UN-HABITAT, the UN Agency for Cities and other Human Settlements, published the Global Report on Human Settlements 2003. The report shows that sub-Saharan Africa today has the world's largest proportion of urban residents living in slums. These slums are home to 72 per cent of urban Africa's citizens. That percentage represents a total of 187 million people. World-wide, slums are home to 1 billion people. Over the next 30 years, that figure could rise to 2 billion if no action is taken.

Slums represent the worst of urban poverty and inequality!

Meeting the challenges of sustainable urbanisation mainly implies addressing the terrible issue of growing slums and unplanned urban neighbourhoods, with the repercussions on environmental degradation, security and safety, increased vulnerability to natural and human made disasters – and I would like here to recall the recent devastating fires in the slums of Bangkok and Dacca. Among all these pressing needs, there is an absolute necessity to ensure better access to urban services so that everyone has adequate shelter, clean water and sanitation. Those are basic needs and human rights.

In this challenging context, it can no longer escape the world's attention that local authorities are the most appropriate actors to effectively deal with these problems on the ground. Mayors, councillors, city managers and local public servants are the front line in the war against urban poverty.

But we cannot also forget that lack of human and financial resources at the municipal level, insufficient decentralisation of powers and resources, and poor urban governance largely contribute to divided and non-inclusive cities. There is a direct link between the lack of local capacities and the magnitude of slums, unemployment and diseases.

Without strong capabilities and financial resources at the local level, many of city problems will not be solved while they are assigned highest priority at national and international levels. If well managed by their mayors and councillors, cities can be true engines of growth for the social, cultural and economic advancement of the world.

This is why UN-HABITAT has developed extensive relations with mayors and local leaders and their associations during the last ten years in various areas, including at the political, normative, institutional, monitoring and operational levels.

I would like to insist today on our operational activities that directly serve the urban poor and promote social inclusion in cities and other settlements. In the last ten years, more than 1,000 towns and cities, mostly in developing countries, have benefited concretely from UN-HABITAT collaboration in terms of capacity-building, urban policy reform, development and environmental planning, monitoring, support to housing and slum upgrading programmes, water and sanitation, infrastructure, security and safety, etc.

It is also because we are convinced of the pre-eminent role of local authorities in addressing the basic needs of the population that we systematically support the

restoration of local capacities in post-conflict contexts, such as in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Somalia.

This extended 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.

Based on our convictions, UN-HABITAT has also always tried to ensure that the voice of local authorities is heard loudly and clearly in international forums, including in the UN inter-governmental machinery. Just allow me to recall the establishment of the UN Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA) in January 2000. Under the chairmanship of the Mayor of Barcelona, Mr. Joan Clos, UNACLA has provided a number of substantive inputs to the work-programme of UN-HABITAT and has been able to advise UN-HABITAT on several strategic issues. The participation of local authorities associations in the governance structure of UN-HABITAT global programmes, such as the Urban Management Programme or the Cities Alliance, also has an incommensurable value to guide the international response to the urban challenges.

As a further step to this fruitful cooperation, I have just announced in Paris the creation of a Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralisation (GOLD) as a “watchdog” of good urban governance and effective decentralisation. It is also fully in line with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan statement: “Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development.”

I have also announced in Paris that UN-HABITAT and UNDP are preparing a programme called “Urban Millennium Partnership – Localising Millennium Development Goals”. This programme will help recognising the local dimension of the MDGs, which has become ‘the organising framework’ for many multi and bilateral development institutions. The Partnership will work with networks of local authorities at the global, national and local levels, to raise awareness about MDGs, mobilise stakeholders and resources, and establish monitoring and implementation frameworks.

This programme will be part of our 3 strategies towards the achievement of MDG target 10 on access to water and target 11 on improving slums, namely: (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.

Finally, I would like to recall that UN-HABITAT organised, from 1996 to 2001, four international conferences of the International Forum on Urban Poverty, a very useful instrument to raise awareness and exchange ideas on social inclusion. The merging of this Poverty Forum with the Environment Forum, together with the growing voice of local authorities and other partners, lead to the creation of the World Urban Forum, which second meeting, as you know, will take place here in Barcelona from 13 to 17 September 2004. I hope that you will also attend this session.

Many issues that will be discussed in September are related to social inclusion and I am confident that the conclusions of your work will be an essential input to our September dialogue.

I wish you full success.