



**Fifty-eighth session of the
Commission on the Status of Women**

**Remarks by
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Ms. Chairperson, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates and colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

“Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work”, the review theme of the 58th session of the CSW, represents one of the main challenges of all the human settlements worldwide and is central in the work of UN-Habitat.

Urbanization is an extremely powerful force and cities are human constructs, which can be planned and developed for the benefit of the entire population. Compared to rural areas, cities can be seen as sites of safety and access to services and resources, but they can also concentrate barriers and threats especially to vulnerable groups, such as women and girls.

Cities generally offer women more diverse work opportunities to increase financial independence, greater ease in accessing education at different levels, better access to healthcare, more chances to socialize outside the home, more opportunities for filling community or political leadership roles and, perhaps most importantly, more possibilities to redefine traditional roles about men and women. However, men’s violence against women, unpaid care work, financial dependence, difficulties in accessing education and healthcare, limited control over assets and property, unequal participation in public and private decision-making, accessibility and affordability of transport are still great barriers to gender equality in urban areas. In slums settlements, women experience even worse conditions due to the greater concentration of poverty aggravated by overcrowding, insecurity, insecure tenure, water and sanitation, as well as lack of access to transport, and sexual and reproductive health services.

Acknowledging these challenges and the potentialities of urban areas, it is clear that to ensure urbanization is a driver for sustainable development, we need to strive to empower women’s and girl’s rights, promote gender equality and equal participation in decision-making, and develop services that benefit equally men and women, and girls and boys. That is, we need to build cities where men and women are recognized as equal partners in development and enjoy fundamental freedoms - including freedom from discrimination in urban policy and practice - and equal human rights.

Ensuring women’s rights in sustainable urban development means ensuring that women have right to housing and land; have access to livelihoods and credit; are involved in decision-making and political development at all levels; have access to clean water, sanitation, and other basic services; have a decent level of safety and security.

Achieving these goals is part of UN-Habitat vision of the New Urban Agenda for the 21st Century. It takes into account that gender equality and women’s empowerment are a key

priority in the overall agency's mandate and in the urban paradigm shift that we must adopt to see the city more as an asset and a solution.

The main points of the vision for the New Urban Agenda for the 21st Century concern:

- Re-embracing the adequate compact and a mixed-use city, that is making a shift away from the mono-functional city of low density and long distances.
- Reasserting urban space, planning design and shaping it in ways that facilitate the process of city development and ensure equitable access to urban basic services and transport infrastructures for women and men.
- Implementing effective laws and regulations, smartening land-use planning and moving from sectorial interventions to those that address the city as a whole.

Adopting this urban paradigm shift will help solving many problems that affects women and girls in all the cities worldwide and will allow women and girls a greater access to education, job opportunities, health care and services in human settlements.

Access to services and opportunities is often neglected to women and girls in the cities by the difficulties related to transiting urban areas. Indeed, unplanned urban growth driven by rapid urbanization has had a negative impact on the city and on the dynamics of mobility and transport planning, moreover for vulnerable groups as women and girls. Also, women experience the city differently than men: they move around urban areas in complex ways, have fewer transport options than men and are less likely to have access to private motorized transport.

A more compact and mixed used city; plans for socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities; measures that minimize discrimination in having access to urban basic services and transport infrastructures are all key instruments that would minimize transport and service delivery cost, promote social diversity and reduce possibilities for gender based violence and crime.

I invite you to explore these issues further at World Urban Forum in Colombia in April this year where UN-Habitat and partners will examine the most pressing issues facing the world today in the area of human settlements, including gender equality and women's empowerment. I also encourage you to take part in the discussion leading up to Habitat III in 2016 where world leaders will meet to review the global urban agenda. Without increased gender equality and women's empowerment we will not be able to create the urban future we want. A city can become prosperous, equitable and sustainable only if women and men enjoy equal human rights and fundamental freedoms and are recognized as equal partners in urban development.

Thank you for your kind attention.