



Inaugural Meeting of the
Advisory Group on Forced evictions

Nairobi 5 March 2004

Welcoming Address by

Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka

Executive Director of UN-HABITAT

Dear Friends,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to Nairobi for this inaugural meeting of the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions. I wish first of all to thank you for your willingness to join this group, despite your heavy workloads, and to contribute to this challenging mission.

I know that this will require that you spend even more of your time working on this controversial and difficult issue of forced evictions. But I also know, for having carefully reviewed each nomination, that all of you are contributing to this endeavour with enthusiasm and eagerness to help improve the lives of the urban poor who are striving for their rights and trying to avoid a worsening of their already difficult lives.

The Governing Council of UN-HABITAT, which recently approved the establishment of this group, has responded to a legitimate request that has emanated from the millions of those who are living on a daily basis under the threat of evictions.

During my tenure as head of UN-HABITAT, I have met and interacted with thousands of those urban poor who in their own simple (but so eloquent and moving) way have entrusted me with their pleading message: “we want to be treated as human beings, we want dignity and security for our children, we request the right to be considered as full citizens”.

As you know UN-HABITAT has a long track record in working with its partners to improve the quality of life in our cities. Hundreds of programmes and projects have directly enhanced the housing situation of urban populations all over the world. They have contributed to sound policies, better management practices and more inclusive environments.

In many countries, the two campaigns for Secure Tenure and Urban Governance have been successful in raising awareness, bringing stakeholders together, creating conditions conducive to positive dialogues and positive attitudes and have given to the urban poor a respected and responsible role.

While I am personally happy to note this unprecedented progress among our partners, I am still dissatisfied by practices in a number of countries that continue to ignore the rights of some citizens, many of whom do not have the capacity to speak for themselves. It is then the role of the UN to remind our partners of their obligations and see that they fully comply with those international agreements to which they have committed themselves.

This is indeed a very sensitive issue and the approach to it may not be simple. Capacity to convince, through good practices, negotiation skills and a deep knowledge of the laws and the rules, is required. The composition of your group has been based on consideration of this principle and I am confident that you will help us to make very quickly a positive change, globally.

I am looking forward to receiving your help in addressing situations where forced evictions are threatened or are in progress in a manner that protects populations at risk and ensures the harmonious development of our cities. I expect also that your periodic reports on the status of evictions in the cities of the world will be a tool that enables UN-HABITAT to engage in a strong a forceful advocacy effort. I want to assure you that I will personally give my utmost attention to your work and see that it is translated into concrete actions.

As you know the Millennium Declaration is targeting the improvement of the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the 2020. This effort must not be thwarted by actions, such as forced evictions, that may, at the same time, worsen the situation for millions of other urban poor.

Joining our efforts together we will fight on these fronts and we will succeed.

I wish you success in your endeavour and I am looking forward to our next meeting at the World Urban Forum in September to measure our progress.