



**PRESENTATION by Mrs ANNA K.TIBAIJUKA,
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of UN-HABITAT**

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**Address to the PLANNING CONVENTION of the
Royal Town Planning Institute:**

***THE IMPORTANCE OF URBAN PLANNING IN GOOD
GOVERNANCE AND GLOBALLY SUSTAINABLE URBAN
DEVELOPMENT***

***Venue: The QEII Conference Centre,
Westminster, London***

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking the Royal Town Planning Institute for inviting me to address you today. I would like to congratulate the Institute, and particularly Jim Claydon, its President, and Robert Upton, its Secretary-General, for giving a high profile to issues of international development in your Convention. I understand Robert is unwell and I wish him an early recovery. I would also like to acknowledge Clive Harridge, your Immediate Past President, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the World Urban Forum in Vancouver last year. The RTPI made a powerful contribution to the Forum, a gathering of over 10,000 people from around the world, and its effort was crucial in putting planning back on the international agenda, from whence it has been missing for at least the last twenty years.

But why should I have congratulated the Institute on its courage particularly as many of your members will inevitably ask: “What has my planning activity in the UK got to do with what is happening elsewhere in the world?”

In some ways it is rather easier for me to answer this question than it was one year ago in touching on the same topic when I addressed the World Planners Congress that preceded the World Urban Forum at Vancouver. Since then we have had the Stern Report on climate change which has had a significant impact on public opinion in a number of developed countries in particular. Planners in the developed world at least, are waking up to the fact that the impact of, for example, urban sprawl, is not just limited to the local environment; it has effect around the globe. Likewise, planning decisions made in some other part of the world will end up having an impact on home turf. Urban sprawl in say Houston, Texas will contribute to the need for managed retreat from the coastline in East Anglia.

Indeed, your own President commented in your house journal *Planning* that discussion at the annual conference of the American Planning Association was highly focussed on climate change and the development of sustainable communities. This is indeed progress.

So am I preaching to an audience of the converted? Well, I hope so, because the dangers of climate change are beyond doubt. But, I would like to expand on this issue of the relationship between international development and the domestic issues dealt with by planners in the UK.

One danger of the current debate is that the term “sustainable development” has become associated, particularly in the developed world, with a purely environmental agenda.

The problem with this perception is that it tends to place the developed and the developing world at odds. This is because what is regarded by the developed world as sustainability is often regarded by the developing world as self-interest and selfishness, a desire to pull up the ladder once prosperity has been attained. The developed world has caused the problem by building up greenhouse gases for generations but it now wants the developing world to pay the price in terms of foregoing economic development. For

example, discussions about energy policy to address climate change in OECD countries are almost always associated with calls for energy security, thus tending to muddy the waters with regard to the real nature of concerns about reducing consumption of fossil fuels.

For developing country nations, and more particularly cities, where 1 billion people currently live in slums on incomes of less than \$1 per day, talk of reducing resource consumption and carbon emissions seems light years away from the daily reality of eking out an existence. Concerns in the North about climate change, can be motivated by a desire to keep things the way they are, mean little to people for whom the dystopia has already arrived, and for whom keeping things the way they are holds little appeal. It might be contended that the urban poor in developing countries will be those most adversely affected by climate change, but this environmental argument does not go far enough - it does not convey an optimistic vision of much-needed socio-economic improvement and poverty reduction.

And the problems of poverty in the cities of the developing world are currently getting worse rather than better. Let us look at the pace and nature of urban growth.

This year, for the first time in history, the majority of the world's population will live in cities. In the future, 90% of all new global population growth is going to be in cities. By 2030 60% of us will live in cities. *Homo sapiens* has become *homo urbanus*.

Most of this increase will take place in the developing world. Cities such as Nairobi in Kenya are doubling in size every 10 years. Lagos in Nigeria will become the largest city in the world by 2020 with over 20 million people.

This trend is particularly marked in less developed countries, which are least equipped to cope with change. Urban areas in these countries will grow at 3% per annum, whereas rural areas will grow at only 0.1% per annum.

This growth is being accompanied by the urbanisation of poverty which affects between 1 and 2 out of every 3 urban dwellers in developing countries. The proportion of the urban poor is growing faster than the rate of urbanisation.

Slum dwellers lack safe water, and face malnutrition, disease and loss of productivity. In many communities, young girls spend hours every day fetching water and thus forgo their education. Most slum dwellers have no access to sanitation. In some of the slums my agency works in, there is no refuse collection and up to 300 people share a single toilet. HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases are rife. Entire families, especially single mothers and their children, eke an existence from informal trading and services at the margins of human dignity. Crime, drugs and violence are daily realities.

Thus the scale and intensity of urban poverty is growing. It is often exacerbated by planning systems that actually discriminate against the poor. Many actions that increase exclusion end up being anti-poor as they are motivated, or at least rationalised by, a

particular image of planning and the planned city, not necessarily held by planners, but expressed by politicians and other opinion-formers.

Nor has the professional and technical practice of planning always been pro-poor. In many countries we find planning standards that are simply not relevant to the poor or actively discriminate against them. How often do we see planning requirements for minimum house plot sizes that are absolutely unattainable for the poor or for levels of road provision that cater for the small minority of the population that has access to a car? How often do we witness the informal commercial sector, a major economic lifeline for slum dwellers, either ignored or abolished by rehabilitation or beautification plans?

The “Planned City” often requires that the poor should at best be hidden or, at worst, swept away.

So in Nairobi, where the poor are hidden, some 80% of the population lives on 5% of the land, and that in the most marginal locations. If you visit Nairobi you are unlikely to see their settlements, crammed at high densities into river flood plains, alongside railway tracks, by garbage dumps, in toxic industrial wasteland.

Or they are swept away. I was the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy to Zimbabwe in 2005 to assess the situation concerning Operation Murambatsvina, or “drive out the trash”. Over 700,000 urban dwellers were evicted and their homes demolished. I found that this operation was justified by the so-called need for “proper planning”. Needless to say, the evictees are still homeless today.

This was not an isolated incident. It is being repeated out of the gaze of the world’s media in many countries. And the dream of the planned city, where the poor have no place, continues to be used as a justification of such actions. Let me quote from the foreword of the recent report by the UN-HABITAT Advisory Committee on Forced Evictions. “Forced evictions have increased dramatically in frequency, in number and in the level of violence. Forced evictions appear to have become a common practice *in lieu* of sustainable urban planning and inclusive social policies....”

But you may continue to ask: “What has this got to do with me? I am not a planner in Zimbabwe or Kenya or Nigeria. I cannot influence what is happening in these countries through my daily work, nor perhaps should I. There are dangers in trying to influence situations of which I know little and understand less”. Let me argue why you should and how you can.

My overall contention is a general one that is not limited to the planning profession. Unless the developed North buys into the need to address poverty in the developing South, there is a danger that many in the South will remain indifferent to the potentially catastrophic environmental change that threatens us all. Our efforts specifically to develop sustainable planning must therefore be focused on two fronts. One front consists of smart growth and of reducing the ecological footprint of our cities to preserve our

common future. The other front consists of social equity and justice to ensure human rights and dignity in our towns and cities.

Poverty needs to be tackled as a problem of at least equal significance to climate change. We must recognise that the urbanisation of poverty is rapidly becoming the weakest link in the chain of our pursuit of sustainable development. Indeed, an over-emphasis on ecological and environmental considerations can be anti-poor – with evictions from watersheds or national parks without alternative provision being made, or from the sites of new towns, or controls on development that restrict access to land for housing by the urban poor.

Poverty also drives global environmental issues. Many cities do not work; they have failed in their traditional role as engines of economic growth and absorbers of surplus labour from rural areas. In desperation, the rural poor cut down forests to provide more agricultural land. Stern estimates that 18% of greenhouse gas emissions emanate from tropical deforestation. Tree cutting in Brazil means climate change in the UK.

Urban poverty in the South, in and of itself, drives change in the North. We are seeing increasing international migration pressures from poor cities in the South which are visited on the streets of richer cities in the North.

You may say, “OK, I accept your argument about why my profession should be concerned about urban poverty in the developing world. But I still don’t understand what my profession can do in practical terms”. But you can do something practical, as a member of the RTPI.

Planning can be a force for good or ill. Some of the most efficient and effective planning ever seen buttressed the separate development policies of apartheid in South Africa, reinforcing exclusion and deprivation. I have already shown that similar notions of planning are employed in many parts of the world to justify exclusionary practices that target the poor and deepen poverty.

Therefore, if it is to become sustainable, planning has to put its house in order. Planning should not and cannot be not ethically neutral. Planners should decide what their profession stands for, and what can be done in the name of planning. And in this, powerful and well-resourced planning organisations in the North, of which the RTPI is amongst the most respected, can bring serious influence to bear. Having been born out of a movement in the rapidly industrialising North to address the horrors of urban poverty, the RTPI has legitimacy in expressing opinions this area. But it is also because world opinion on sustainable development, as exemplified in the Millennium Development Goals and the World Summit on Sustainable Development and endorsed by the international community, is not neutral either.

Important first steps on this road have been made. I was most gratified to see many planning organisations and senior players from within their ranks, including those from the RTPI, signing up to the *Vancouver Declaration* and the think-piece on *Reinventing*

Planning on the occasion of the last World Urban Forum. These statements signal to the world that exclusionary planning practices are not sustainable and are not endorsed by the planning community at large. They will help remove one source of legitimacy for exclusionary approaches.

Furthermore, as another practical measure, planning should vigorously claim an important, perhaps unique niche to fill in creating sustainable development. As a non-sectoral discipline that deals with land and infrastructure, it is well placed to balance social, economic and environmental pressures in both developed and developing countries. However, this cannot be done without involvement in and engagement with city communities, and particularly the poor, in other words through good urban governance.

If old-fashioned expert-driven models of “predict and provide” hold sway, this approach often being rationalised by arguments that it promotes economic growth and efficiency, there is the danger that the rich and powerful will continue to appropriate the fruits of development. Therefore, participatory models of “debate and decide”, which involve civil society and elected local representatives, need to become the default mode in driving sustainable urban development. Such approaches are more likely to produce decisions that balance social, environmental and economic considerations. Urban planning was indeed one of the first disciplines to pioneer public participation, but this experience has not been absorbed in the practice of planning in many parts of the world.

But urban planning’s potential to promote sustainable development is strongly linked to the need to reinvent its image, methodologies and tools. Although great strides have been made, there is much left to do. Notwithstanding its association in the minds of non-planners with often costly, unimplementable and unresponsive master plans – a historical association which is now often unwarranted - planning is still too closely linked with unpopular bureaucratic and legalistic land use controls. A new and easily understood paradigm of planning that reflects an underlying practice needs to be marketed.

Another practical measure is a frank appraisal of the tools planning uses to achieve sustainable development. Many think that planning needs to reconnect with infrastructure provision, and particularly with transportation, as a key lever. This also means that planning has to be integrated into budgetary processes. These changes would also help alter the image of planning from being a negative controlling influence to a proactive, progressive force.

In the developing country context, such changes would have the benefit of inserting planning into existing investment processes and providing a means by which social, economic and environmental objectives can be reconciled and realised. Indeed, through infrastructure investment, win-win solutions can be obtained. Transportation systems can meet both poverty reduction and ecological objectives, water supply networks can influence patterns of growth and encourage increasingly compact cities, infrastructure and land development standards can increase spatial efficiency and access to services.

An important function of sustainable planning is to ensure that we are not continually playing catch-up with demand. Planning is an essential tool for advanced provision of land for the urban poor. Rather than congregate on the land no-one else wants, they will be able to live in conditions of reasonable safety unaffected by fear of flood, landslide or other natural calamity, in a satisfactory physical environmental, and near to services and employment opportunities. They must enjoy security of tenure as a result of settling in planned areas and ideally, they will be able to collateralise the investment they make in their land.

Planning should also connect with initiatives taking place in related arenas. Disaster management is one of these. For example, the Stern report makes a clear distinction between adaptation and mitigation in climate change measures. Planning is mainly seen by Stern as a tool for adaptation to climate change in the developed world. This undersells sustainable planning, which is additionally an instrument for mitigation. It is also a powerful tool for adaptation in the developing world, especially by helping to ensure that vulnerable communities are less exposed to risk. In this instance, planning's professional associations could engage with specific initiatives such as the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, which through its Hyogo Framework, is promoting the resilience of local communities. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors has successfully done this for other built environment professions on land issues.

In taking such initiatives, planning can help address the problem that it is not well-understood by other professions – too often planners debate amongst themselves rather than engage with a wider audience. Knowledge about planning in my own profession - the “dismal science” of economics - is superficial. In your own *Planning* magazine, former Environment Secretary John Gummer argued that planning's contribution to the debate on climate change was too small. The legacy of planning's wilderness years is that professionals from other disciplines, decision-makers and civil society in general have not yet recognised the potential of planning to address the challenge of sustainability.

Finally, in addressing the “what has it got to do with me?” question, I would argue that sustainable urban development requires a complementary strategy of internationalisation by the planning profession. Stronger and more financially viable planning associations need to reach out in solidarity and goodwill to their fellow professionals in weaker associations. This is not charity – it is self-interest. And all associations can learn from the practices of others no matter the variations in levels of institutional development. The creation of the Global Planners Network, an evolving alliance of planning associations set up as a response to the stimulus of Vancouver, of which the RTPI and UN-HABITAT are both members, is an important first step towards addressing sustainable planning in our inter-connected world.

Within my own agency the attention given to planning is greater than ever before. In UN-HABITAT's Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan just approved by our Governing Council, planning has featured strongly for the first time in many years. At the World Urban Forum in Vancouver we joined hands and started making a difference. I am

looking forward to the World Urban Forum in Nanjing next year as another opportunity not only to reflect on progress made but also to chart our way into the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the Royal Town Planning Institute,

The future role of planning in sustainable urban development is important. I have argued that if it is to respond to new global challenges, that planning in one country is no longer enough, that the connection of the local decision to its global impact has to be taken into account, that international solidarity is required and that all planners have a role to play in this. UN-HABITAT, as a global agency which has the mandate to address issues of sustainable urban development, stands ready to work with you.

Thank you for your kind attention.