



UN-HABITAT

Address by
Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and
Executive Director of UN-HABITAT
On the occasion of World Habitat Day,
in The Hague on Monday 1 October 2007

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Your Worship Mr. Wim Deetman, Honourable Mayor of the Hague and Chairman of UCLG,

Honourable Mr. Bert Koenders, Minister for Development Cooperation,

Honourable Ms. Ella Vogelaar, Minister for Housing, Communities and Integration,

Honourable Ms. Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of Housing, Republic of South Africa,

Honourable Mr. Chairman, Jan Pronk, former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in Sudan and Minister in the Dutch Government,

Excellencies
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

World Habitat Day is the most important date on our international calendar. It is our occasion to remind the world, our leaders and our citizens, that the first Monday every October is an occasion to be ever alert and vigilant to the great urban changes sweeping our planet. And so it gives me great pleasure, and indeed great honour, to thank Your Worship, Mayor Deetman, for so kindly offering to host the 2007 global celebration of World Habitat Day in this wonderful and great city. In the same breath, I also wish the

Honourable Ministers, Mr. Koenders, and Ms. Vogelaar, to know how deeply grateful we are for the continuing very generous financial and political support that the Government of The Netherlands has always shown the United Nations and especially, our agency, UN-HABITAT.

I wish all of you gathered here today to know that The Netherlands is among the top five donors to our budget. This support includes the financial provisions your Government has made to help us bring clean water and sanitation to millions of people in the developing world. It includes your support for our goal of achieving sustainable cities – cities without slums. It includes your support for our programmes working with people who have lost everything in disasters or conflict. And here I am thinking of the countless Indian Ocean tsunami survivors whose homes were rebuilt with generous Dutch support, and more recently the people of Lebanon now rebuilding after a spate of conflict last year. Indeed, for nearly 20 years now, we have worked in close partnership with The Institute for Housing and urban Development Studies.

So please, ladies and gentlemen, let me pause for a moment to ask you to for a big hand of applause for the wonderful support of our Dutch partners.

Thank you. I am delighted to see that our distinguished gathering today also includes the Honourable Minister Sisulu, South Africa's Minister of Housing, and Mr. Scott Leckie, Founder of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The subject that brings us here today, is something that touches us all. Crime and fear of crime is growing unacceptably fast at a time half of humanity is now living in towns and cities. There is no doubt too, that today most crime and violence occurs in cities. And this is the reason, as I said in my special statement for World Habitat Day 2007, we decided to chose the theme, *A safe city is a just city*, to mark the occasion.

As we witness the fastest growth of urban populations yet known, we are now at the dawn of a new urban era. With half of humanity already living in towns and cities, it is projected that by 2030, that figure will rise to two-thirds. Another feature of our new urban age is that the global number of slum dwellers is now set this year to top the 1 billion mark.

Promoting urban safety at this turning point in history is not primarily about policing and relying on the penal system for crime prevention; it is about the design and planning of public space for women and men, and its impact on social urban development. While conventional methods have focused more on the laws, community policing, or security personnel to guard communities, less attention has been focused on the other missing link of public safety – urban design and governance of cities. Poorly lit or dark streets and poor public transport are typical examples of the underlying factors conducive to crime. While crime remains a key conventional dimension of urban safety, today safety is about

increasing choices so that everyone can move freely without threat, harassment, sexual assault, rape, or intimidation.

I do not have to tell you that crime is bad for business and bad for development. In an unacceptably high number of cities around the world, soaring crime levels, and even perceptions of high crime, threaten to outweigh other advantages they may offer. For slum residents, who usually do not enjoy the benefits of any form of security, violence and crime loom ever ready to shatter their lives. As violent men capture the streets, the choices for women are considerably diminished. They simply do not want to take a chance using a public toilet, collecting water, or walking through a criminal male danger zone on the way home, to school or the shops.

Persistent crime and fear of crime undermines public trust in the authorities. And thus in many cities, local neighbourhoods turn to alternative protection – private companies, vigilante groups, and gated zones. Worse still, they turn away from young people, and tarnish them with the blame for these problems, instead of engaging them.

Urban danger comes from many complex factors. These include lack of opportunity, widening inequity, territorial segregation, economic polarisation, poor urban planning, and social exclusion. Likewise, drugs, guns, organized crime, and poor crime prevention. And so, unfortunately, it is all too obvious that recent international terror attacks increasingly target cities.

In many countries, safety, security and justice are outside the purview of local authorities and are highly centralized. Enhancing the role of local government as well as local communities and in particular the youth of these communities, is recognized as an important first step to improvements in many aspects of safety, security and justice.

At the third session of UN-HABITAT's World Urban Forum in Vancouver in June last year, one of our keynote speakers, Ms. Katherine Sierra, Vice-President and Network Head, Infrastructure, at the World Bank, recalled that 30 years ago, safety and security would not have even been mentioned as a building block for an urban strategy. In remarks that constitute a most apt explanation of the theme of World Habitat Day this year, she said, and I quote:

“A key policy challenge is how to balance safety and security within a political or social system and a regulatory environment that is conducive to economic growth. Safety, law enforcement, and the justice system are thus key public goods. The legislative and justice systems, along with enforcement entities, become key institutions.” End of quotation.

Ladies and gentlemen.

The situation I have just outlined is largely the reason why UN-HABITAT, as the agency for the built environment, launched its Safer Cities Programme in 1996 to create a culture of prevention anchored in helping local authorities, the criminal justice system, the private sector, urban planners, and civil society partners address urban safety.

As UN-HABITAT and governments that oversee the agency's work programme hone a new strategic plan for 2008-2013, there is general agreement on four points:

Firstly, that governance at the local level must continue looking at crime prevention. Local crime prevention strategies must be incorporated in urban development planning, and this must have full political backing.

Secondly, that bridging the gap between urban interventions and crime prevention can be achieved by incorporating prevention policies into slum upgrading and housing policies.

Thirdly, that public spaces in cities have to be better managed. Derelict public urban spaces are a dramatic indicator of the failure of planning and governance.

Fourthly, that civil society, especially youth and women, must be fully engaged in any crime prevention strategy.

Experience shows that local policies, targeted to key problems and root causes, can be very effective against violence and lawlessness.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Given the many differences in culture, geography, wealth, political systems and size of cities, there will always be problems. But in the modern world we do have solutions. And I wish to conclude these remarks by informing you that the situation is not altogether gloomy. I sense a strong emerging view in this new urban era that the political will is now growing, at both the national and local level in many countries, to make our cities safe and just places for all.

And in concluding, I recognise Mayor Deetman, who serves as Chairman of the global body, United Cities and Local Governments, as someone who leads the new way here.

Thank you for your attention.