



Statement by Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka

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to the Commonwealth Youth Forum Opening ceremony, Entebbe, Uganda on 14
November 2007

Mr. Chairman,
His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni,
Hon, Mrs. Florence Mugasha, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General
Hon, Ministers present here,
Hon, Vic Craggs, Commonwealth Youth Council,
Invited dignitaries,
Commonwealth Youth Forum International planning committee,
Fellow young delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very excited to be back in Uganda. Last year I was here in April when I had the privilege to address the commonwealth meeting on Africa's urbanization crisis. It is an honor and a privilege for me to be here with you today at this Commonwealth Youth Forum

I wish to congratulate the Commonwealth Youth Council for organizing this youth forum which will provide a platform for young people to contribute to the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Heads of Government agendas. I am pleased that this forum also provides an independent platform for youth representatives to consider their agenda at the same time as the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting.

My Young Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to present to you some key points that I would like to call an "agenda for action".

The Age of Homo Urbanus

This meeting is taking place at a critical turning point in human history. 2007 is a year when *homo sapiens* will become a predominantly urban species, *homo urbanus*. From now on the majority of people will no longer be rural but urban dwellers. There is no going back for this transition is irreversible and accelerating.

The world's urban population is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 1.78% between 2005 and 2030, almost twice the growth rate of the world's total population.

Numbers say it all

Let me give you some statistics to put this in perspective. The key findings from our latest research give a measure of the urban crisis we face: In 2005, Asia accounted for nearly 60 percent of the world's slum population with a total of 581 million slum dwellers. Sub-Saharan Africa had 199 million slum dwellers constituting some 20 percent of the world's total. Latin America had 134 million making up 14 percent of the total. At the global level, 30 per cent of all urban dwellers lived in slums in 2005, a proportion that has not changed significantly since 1990. However, in the last 15 years, the magnitude of the problem has increased substantially: 283 million more slum dwellers have joined the global urban population. At regional level, 72% of urban Africa is living in slums and informal settlements, 46% of Asia and 23% of Latin America! The speed of urban growth and the enormous numbers involved make urbanization one of the major development challenges of this century. Just imagine, by 2030 Africa will cease to be a rural continent, the majority of people will be in urban areas and the same goes for Asia. Over the last 30 years Latin America has become urban and 75% of the people are already in cities and towns.

Youth as part of the bigger picture

The number of young people globally, relative to the adult population is also about to become the largest in history. Globally, youth, aged 15- to 24, now represent almost one-fifth of the world's population. At present, almost 60 per cent of the world's youth live in the developing countries of Asia, with another 15 per cent in Africa and 10 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Approximately 15 per cent live in developed regions. This growth in number makes it imperative to put youth on the development agenda in every country especially the developing world. In other words the youth agenda is central to the development agenda.

Figures show that Africa, compared to other regions of the world, has the largest proportion of young people in its population, 36.7 percent in 2000, compared to 27.3 percent for the world. In Africa, it is estimated that young people make up more than 50 percent of the population of most countries. In absolute terms, it is estimated that there are presently about 122 million youth on the African continent. And the majority of the people in slums are children and young people.

Urbanisation and Migration

Africa is also the fastest urbanizing continent in the world. Today seventy per cent of urban Africans live in slums and by the year 2030 half of Africa's population will be living and working in towns and cities, the majority of this population will be living in slums unless something is done about it.

Migration to urban areas takes place not because of real opportunities for better wages and livelihood but due to the expectations of such opportunities. As argued by the two economists Harris and Todaro, individuals take their decisions on migration based on the consideration of the differentials of expected incomes between their present sector and the sector they intend to go. However, quite often expectations and reality diverge considerably and dreams often turn to nightmares for those seeking the better life in cities. In other words, people move or migrate not because they will be better off, but because they expect to be better off. This expectation pushes people to seek for greener pastures and when they do not succeed they still stay, in the hope that it will be better for their children. So, here again the importance of the youth is clear!

Unchecked flows of rural poor seeking better lives have exerted an unbearable strain on Africa's capitals. The situation is similar to the conditions in Europe during the 18th century when rural migrants seeking better opportunities in urban areas quickly find themselves in urban slums. And for those of you who might have not seen a slum, UN-HABITAT defines it as a living quarter that has no access to safe drinking water, sanitation, of non-durable building structures, overcrowded with 2 people who should not be sharing a bedroom doing so, and without security of tenure, in the sense that one can be evicted without notice either by the landlord for lack of contract or by municipal authorities who tend to demolish such settlements of the so called squatters.

But then we know that migration has historically improved the well-being of individuals and humanity as a whole. Just think how many countries and cities around the world were founded by migrants. Or today, how many economies are driven by the energy and initiative of new-comers. Let us not forget that what we call the “New World”, namely the Americas and Australasia was populated by immigrants from Europe. This massive shift of people occurred at a time when Europe was experiencing rapid urbanisation and urban growth under the industrial revolution. It is this twin phenomenon of rural to urban migration and migration to the new world that shaped the demography and the economy of modern Europe and the New World. The cities of the developing world today are very similar to the descriptions of London Paris, and New York immortalized in the writings of Charles Dickens, Emile Zola and Jacob Riis. These cities have since addressed these problems through public policy and investments, highlighting the fact that urban poverty is **not** a phenomenon that is impossible to overcome. Slum is not destiny and poverty is not insurmountable. It is a matter of political will and good governance to allocate the resources needed to secure sustainable urbanization.

Mercifully, the dark vision of Thomas Malthus, who predicted that population growth could not be sustained by food production did not come to pass thanks in large part to trade, technology and migration. In other words the right policies on trade, technology and migration are required to bring the benefits of urbanization to the developing world. In this regards, youths would continue to play a major role in creating the future that we all desire where the benefits of a just and sustainable society is not limited to a few. Youth have to demand good policies that can prove doomsday philosophies as those of Malthus wrong. However the youth must also understand that without the right policies, the projections of Malthus could well come to pass. At the moment urban poverty is increasing and without exception slum dwellers are hungry and not healthy UN-HABITAT's research, in our State of the World Cities Report, 2006/2007, shows that teenage pregnancies in slums are higher than any other parts of the population. The same applies to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB and water-borne diseases. Indeed for every indicator on infant mortality and HIV/AIDS prevalence, the urban poor are worse off. This is what we call the urban penalty.

Resolving the conundrum of chaotic urbanization requires a multi-level institutional approach involving all tiers of governance and government. This is why UN-HABITAT believes in the imperative of devolution of powers to the lower levels through decentralization and empowering local authorities so that they can manage their own resources and deal with their own challenges. Housing is a local issue and can be best solved at the local level provided there are policy frameworks and resources that let local authorities lead in solving the shelter crisis. The engagement of youth in empowering local government is important so that their voices also can be better heard. Local government must in turn empower communities and take into account gender and age dimensions. We have a campaign at UN-HABITAT on Good urban governance. Its main principle is promoting participation and fostering transparency and accountability.

UN-HABITAT's role

UN-HABITAT is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.

To realize this goal, UN-HABITAT runs a number of global programmes that involve countries from all over the world. These programmes which include the Water and Sanitation, Gender and Youth and Safer Cities Programme involve a wide range of partners from central government, local government to civil society and beneficiary communities.

-The Global report on Human Settlements, 2007

UN-HABITAT has just published its Global report on Human Settlements, 2007, "Enhancing Urban Safety and Security". It addresses three major threats to the safety and security of cities: crime and violence; insecurity of tenure and forced evictions; and natural and human-made disasters.

The report analyses worldwide trends with respect to each of these threats, paying particular attention to their underlying causes and impacts, as well as to the good policies and best practices that have been adopted at the city, national and international levels to address these threats.

In all countries, the situation of youth unemployment for instance, has widespread implications for security. Our work in post post-conflict situations is characterized by the incidence of an extremely vulnerable youth population. For example, demobilized combatants are prone to return to a life of violence if they do not have the means to a decent livelihood. UN-HABITAT believes that young people have a very important role to play as peace builders and should not just be viewed as victims and perpetrators of conflict.

Providing skills for young people in peace building, negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution is of utmost importance in achieving sustainable development. UN-HABITAT is also supporting youth to child centers in conflict and post-conflict environments such as Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia. Sports, Information Communication Technologies, health and arts are used as entry points for training young people as peace builders and agents of change in preventing and resolving conflicts in their communities.

Experience shows that local policies, targeted to key problems and root causes, can be very effective against violence and lawlessness. Civil society, especially youth and women, must be fully engaged in any urban safety and crime prevention strategy.

Bridging the gap between urban interventions and crime prevention can be achieved by incorporating prevention policies into slum upgrading and housing policies.

Housing and Human Settlements Finance Systems.

My agency is committed to helping governments and local authorities upgrade slums in their cities. The only way we can successfully improve our slums is by bringing together all key actors and stakeholders, including the slum dwellers themselves. We need to solve the problems of land and security of tenure. We need to work with developers, planners, service providers, banks and savings and credit associations and housing cooperatives. We are now focusing on promoting access of low income people and slum dwellers to mortgage finance, so that the poor can also do what the rich people do, namely get a loan to secure a decent home. But this requires affordable housing finance credit systems that are generally not in place. We are working closely with national and municipal governments to strengthen or establish appropriate housing finance systems, which can mobilize domestic savings and move affordable housing to scale. Normally mortgage finance takes many years, 25-40 years. Again it is a youth agenda. We are particularly assisting young people to form and register housing cooperatives and building associations since time is on their side. Collectively they can minimize risks and improve their bargaining power to access decent housing through credit.

I urge young people to form housing cooperatives, housing associations, construction brigades and the like to access credit and loans to improve their livelihoods. This is especially important for female headed households. In many countries in Africa, as much as 30 per cent of households are headed by women. In this country, we have pilot projects on this issue in partnership with UWESO, Uganda Women Efforts to Save Orphans. This NGO was created by First Lady Janet Museveni and is one of the world's best practices. In its vision and wisdom UWESO seeks to keep orphans in their original communities and assist them to stay where they are as far as possible. It was established that the biggest challenge facing orphan households was to maintain their dwellings and when houses left by parents collapsed, children had no option but to end up in the streets. UN-HABITAT is therefore desirous to work with UWESO and other partners to improve the shelter conditions of such structures including providing water harvesting facilities to assist the young orphans to go to school. The fate of the orphans and street children is in my view something that this August body might wish also to point out to the Heads of State Summit as an important element of the youth agenda.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change

The environment is another issue that young people should be interested in. You are not only leaders of today but also tomorrow, so clearly you must be keen to make sure that resources that are limited and finite are not squandered by the current generation but secured for those to come. During the upcoming UN Climate Change summit in Bali, at the 13th session of the Convention of the Parties on Climate Change, it is imperative that your interests are fully taken into account. Those polluting the environment and reluctant to change their lifestyle cannot claim to have the interest of children and young people at heart because you will be most adversely affected in future as the environment deteriorates from a variety of stresses and pollution. As we

speak one third of urban slum dwellers in Africa are actually environmental refugees from pastoral societies that are embroiled in endless conflict as they fight for grazing and water rights. Imagine Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, and other minor but fatal conflicts related to cattle rustling! The fundamental cause of the conflicts is environmental stress. Imagine if sea levels rise, the poor living in slums, the majority of them young people, will be affected by such disasters! I encourage young people to push world leaders to engage urban youth in combating climate change, utilizing their boundless energy and creativity to face this truly global challenge.

Trade negotiations

Urbanization is a good thing, provided it is accompanied by employment opportunities in towns and cities. But when urbanization takes place prematurely, without requisite improvements in rural productivity and prosperity you have problems of urban poverty as is being experienced at the moment. This brings into focus the need for the youth to understand the importance of trade in development.

In order to promote competitiveness in trade and urban employment opportunities, there is a need to promote tertiary and secondary industries in developing countries that depend on primary commodity exports. The Doha round of trade negotiations is important in this context.

What area of the current WTO Doha negotiation offers the greatest benefits for the developing world? Cutting trade-distorting farm subsidies and eliminating export subsidies in the developed world is an important one. - a vital part of a development round that should interest the youth.

Recent economic analysis emphasized the fact that an important contribution to the Doha round for the developing world will also come from the negotiations to update WTO rules on customs procedures that have remained unchanged for over five decades.

Nowhere is this more critical than in the developing world, where exporters are up against the biggest hurdles in getting their goods to market. Small exporters in poor countries struggle the most with bureaucracy and difficult customs procedures, which can stretch customs clearance into days and some times months. What are the chances for young people to establish small micro enterprises including in trade if they have to be confronted not only by an uneven international trade regime but also hostile and corrupt officials and cumbersome trade rules.

I would like to urge you to familiarize yourselves with these issues and influence the multilateral negotiations in the right direction and trade facilitation reforms to enable you to empower yourselves economically and rise to your potential.

Conclusion

Despite the gloomy figures I gave earlier, youth are a resource, in fact the most important and strategic resource a country can have. Youth are agents of social change; they take on a very active role in addressing the issues that affect them. We have examples of many youth led processes that are working and making a difference in society even with minimal resources. What is required is to provide these initiatives with an enabling environment that will facilitate their replication.

We at the United Nations just as our colleagues at the Commonwealth have long recognized that the world's youth are a resource for the advancement of societies; indeed they are often the leaders of social, political and technological developments. Youth are an asset and not a liability provided they are empowered and given a chance to rise to their full potential and contribute positively to society instead of being drawn into crime and antisocial behavior for lack of alternatives.

Youth should not be seen as a problem, but as a force for change. In my own agency UN-HABITAT, we recognize the fact that the imagination, ideals and energies of young women and men are vital for the continuing development of societies in which they live. We also see them as high contributors to achieving our mandate of "Adequate shelter for all and Sustainable Development". Both at normative and operational level my agency is mainstreaming youth issues. This is the only way to achieve sustainable development for future generations. That is why I had to leave other duties and come to this meeting to share these thoughts with you.

The Commonwealth is an important international body due to its engagement of both developed and developing countries. Working from this strength we encourage the Commonwealth to continue to be a leading global body in supporting young people, especially young people in cities and we urge the youth to petition the heads of state coming to CHOGM to allocate more resources to youth programmes. We encourage you to continue to establish and strengthen partnerships between governments, youth, civil society, local government and academia that address and advance the cause of young people. We at UN-HABITAT are eager to partner with you to facilitate and advance these partnerships.

My final words to you are to encourage you to continue to be active and creative, innovative and break 'barriers', and use your energy and potential to make our societies better.

And I would like to invite all of you to join us at the 4th Session of the World Urban Forum to be held in the ancient City of Nanjing, China, from 13-17 October 2008. We shall hold an Urban Youth Forum, where once again you can take the global platform to articulate your agenda at the global stage.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.