

# UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

**Statement by Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka  
Executive Director of UN-HABITAT  
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations  
on the occasion of the meeting of the  
Global Parliamentarians on Habitat.  
Nairobi, 1 April 2009**

Honourable Members of the Board of Directors of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat,  
Honourable Mariam Nalubega, Acting President of GPH Africa and Chair of the session,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

***Mr. President,***

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the Governing Council for UN-Habitat.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat for helping us gather here today the distinguished Members of your Board of Directors.

Many of you have travelled from afar and I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation. Your presence and support is vital to us in our joint quest for sustainable and harmonious cities.

Welcome to Nairobi. Karibuni!

### ***Brief background***

Since your foundation in 1987, in Yokohama, to spearhead the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, your august body has always maintained close cooperation with UN-HABITAT. Indeed we are indebted to you, as we recall your participation and wise counsel at both the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), in Istanbul in 1996, and five years later at the Istanbul+5 Meeting in New York.

You have also watched our biennial World Urban Forum meetings grow into what has become the world's premier conference on cities. And you have never lost an opportunity on these occasions to help guide us through the complexities and difficulties of a rapidly urbanizing world. I cannot tell you how much we appreciate your support.

Honourable Members of Parliament,

### ***The financial crisis and climate change***

As we meet today, confronted by the financial crisis and the ravages of climate change, your decision to strengthen the African and Asian chapters of Global Parliamentarians on Habitat could not be a more timely one.

As the financial tsunami sweeps people's homes from under their feet in the United States and other countries, we have no time to lose when it comes to the rapidly urbanising developing countries, already home to some 1 billion slum dwellers.

UN-HABITAT, the agency for sustainable urban development, works to promote a better urban future for all. But we are faced with a truly daunting challenge: Our latest research shows that sub-Saharan Africa today still has the world's highest proportion of its city dwellers living in slums. They constitute 62 percent of Africa's urban population. That compares to 43 percent in South Asia, 37 percent in East Asia, 28 percent in Southeast Asia, 27 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 15 percent in North Africa.

As high and volatile food and energy prices have pushed another 100 million people around the world into poverty, we now face the prospect that our collective efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals will be rolled back.

### **What role can Parliamentarians play in facing the challenge of climate change?**

As Parliamentarians you hold the keys when it comes to legislating for a better urban future, and for greener, more caring and inclusive cities that enshrine the rights of their citizens, especially those of women. In most countries it is you who set the laws and have an important say in budget allocations.

For UN-HABITAT, you represent a vital link to help ensure that shelter and urban poverty reduction are addressed in national policies.

### **A word on Nanjing**

I see several of you in this distinguished gathering today who joined us in Nanjing, China, in November last year at the fourth session of the World Urban Forum.

I remember your round-table meeting on Cities and Climate Change and the Role of Parliamentarians in Nanjing. This meeting reminded us very clearly of the need for preventive action and planning to offset effects of climate change through timely action. It was a message I know many of you raised once you returned to your countries. We are deeply indebted to you for this support!

We are in close contact with other Parliamentary groups who can promote our mission for a better urban future. It gives me great pleasure therefore to cite among

them the Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We are progressing well in engaging them in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and achieving the human settlements related Millennium Development Goals.

I also wish to commend the Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa for their efforts to support several African countries in tackling critical social and economic issues. Barely a month after the World Urban Forum, we signed a special cooperation agreement with the Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to invite you all to the next World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro.

***Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,***

In preparation for Rio, I would like to invite all of you to join me in concrete action. My first priority after the conclusion of the Governing Council is to launch the Global Campaign on Sustainable Urbanisation.

The street name for this campaign will be the “World Urban Campaign” and its motto is “Better City, Better Life”. The primary purpose of this Campaign is to elevate the visibility and attention accorded to sustainable and harmonious urban development so as to make your task easier to adopt more appropriate and enabling legislation. For those of you who have already done so, we would like to have your stories. Our experience has shown us that copies of model legislation are always welcome, but what is equally welcome is how specific hurdles were overcome.

I invite all of you to join me in this endeavour. Actions can range from organising special events and round tables in your respective constituencies, to reviving or establishing National Habitat Committees of Platforms. The latter is a very important means for informing and mobilising a wide range of stakeholders to support your endeavours, be that the enactment of new legislation or, just as importantly, the effective dissemination, understanding and implementation of recently adopted legislation.

We will be developing, in the weeks to come, simple guidelines on how to establish such committees and platforms and how they can link with us and other national committees and partner groups to share information and information tools, examples of good legislation and documented best practices.

In conclusion, I wish to state how important and beneficial our cooperation is to both sides.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and great success in the outcome of this conference.

Thank you for your kind attention.