

UN HABITAT

Address by
Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT
on the occasion of the Gender and Women Roundtable
in Rio de Janeiro,
Wednesday 24 March 2010

Honourable Nilcéa Friere of the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women,
Brazil,

And fellow panellists of the Gender and Women's Roundtable:

Ms Caroline Andrew, *Professor of Political Studies, University of Ottawa,*

Ms Arlene Bailey, *Founder of Fletchers Land Parenting Association in
Jamaica,*

Ms Liliano Raneiro, *Coordinator of the Women and Habitat Network
Latin America,*

Ms Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, *Regional Program Director for Brazil
and South Cone,*

Councillor Sandra Beatriz-Rojas Sandoval Cupe, *Councillor for the City
of Ayacucho, Peru,*

Mrs Jan Peterson, Chair of the Huairou Commission, and 2009 UN-HABITAT
Scroll of Honour Award winner,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Women's safety is the single most important factor of better, smarter cities.

If women do not feel safe, the city is unsafe. And this means providing safety
from the home and all those places in between—streets, parks, schools,
neighbourhoods and other public spaces. It must be a continuum – from door to
door, day and night.

It is unacceptable that this is merely something women should put up with. It is
unacceptable that millions of women, especially those living in poverty, have to
be on their guard every waking hour when they venture outdoors anywhere. Cities
where rape statistics show daily and sometimes hourly violations are cities of
shame.

Successful approaches to improve women's safety and to make cities women-
friendly must start with the planning of our urban spaces.

And it needs to start today. Many women regularly feel insecure in cities, especially at night and in particular neighbourhoods.

The fear of crime and violence can be as damaging and inhibiting to women than actual violence. Actual violence may not happen every day, but fear is lingering and pervasive...and it is often associated with public spaces.

Think of all the poorly lit streets, narrow alleyways, remote parking lots or desolate parks.

Fear of violence and crime hinders women's ability to participate fully in urban life, let alone lead normal lives.

But sound urban planning can and does make a difference. Planning is as much social as it is physical. Planning is a gender issue.

It is utterly shameful, that traditionally, women's development has not been part of urban planning. It is shameful too that the larger women's movement has not paid sufficient attention to this. But this is changing! And your presence here at this Roundtable, as part of the World Urban Forum, is testament of this.

I find myself before you today at the end of two terms in office still having to vent my anger about these matters. For 15 years UN-HABITAT has been working on urban safety. We have been advising, supporting and training local authorities around the world.

And through these 15 years we are seeing that good governance and equitable participation of women in decision-making about urban spaces goes a long way towards creating safer cities.

Last year, UN-HABITAT published the *Global Assessment of Women's Safety*. It carries research of the Huairou Commission, Women in Cities International and other women's networks in cities around the world. It shows that we have more than enough know-how and experience in these matters. It also shows governments, municipalities and neighbourhoods the way forward.

Women's networks have a diverse set of resources and capacity to conduct research that enriches our understanding of the problems and good practices around women's urban safety.

And let me add with further anger. Cities which are unsafe for women, are also unsafe for the children they support. Investing in women friendly cities is also an investment in a better future for our children. It is not rocket science here. Cities that are safe, are cities that are good for business.

UN-HABITAT will continue working with our partners and with UNIFEM on the Global Campaign on Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women.

We are also working within the wider framework of the United Nations Secretary General's Campaign, "United to End Violence Against Women."

I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you!