



better cities, better life

Inaugural Address UN Pavilion Lecture Series
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The world urban campaign – making a dream come true

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Each Century has its trademark.

The 19th Century was a period in history marked by major innovations in medicine and disease prevention which contributed to the rapid acceleration in population growth in the western world. Europe's population doubled from roughly 200 million to more than 400 million inhabitants. The 19th Century was remarkable in the widespread formation of new settlements, particularly in North America and Australasia, with approximately 70 million people leaving Europe in quest of a better life. In the beginning of the 19th Century, only 2 percent of the global population lived in urban areas. The Industrial Revolution spread from the United Kingdom through Europe, North America, and eventually to the whole world.

The 20th Century was characterized by global changes in market relations, scientific discoveries, and a revolution in information technology and communications. Computers, public education and internet made knowledge widely available to people. It was also the first century of air transport, space travel and international covenants enshrining human rights. Advanced medical technology improved the welfare of many people, and helped boost life expectancy from 35 to 65 years.

At the beginning of the 20th Century only about one person in ten lived in urban areas. It was a time when there were at least 13 cities with more than one million inhabitants. By 1950 that grew to 68. At the end of the 20th Century there were at least 250 cities with more than one-million inhabitants –many in Asia, especially in China and India.

The 21st Century will be known as the century of the city – a moment in history when one human being tipped the scales to make the global population predominantly urban. This has already happened, and we are now in the age of homo-urbanus. During this century megacities will continue to grow and massive conurbations of more than 20 million people, known as meta-cities, will emerge. The urban geography of the world will drastically change with new regional urban systems such as mega-regions, urban corridors, and city-regions. Simultaneously, the majority of the world's urban population will continue to live in small cities with less than 500,000 inhabitants and intermediate cities with between 1 and 5 million inhabitants.

The international system –as constructed during the 20th Century– will be almost unrecognizable in the coming 90 years owing to the rise of emerging economies, a globalizing economy, the historic transfer of relative wealth and economic power from West to East, and fundamental changes in energy use and access to natural resources. It is my fervent hope that the 21st Century will also go down in history as the time when women were truly able to participate as equals in every sphere of human existence and endeavour – as the century of gender of equality.

In this century science and technology will assume increasing importance in society and new inventions and discoveries, such as biotechnology, nanotechnology and info-technology, will progress exponentially. However, it is possible that the trademark of the 21st Century will be the search for ecologically balanced and sustainable urban development. A vision of sustainability interlinking the natural and the built environment, rural and urban settings, past and modern values begs this question: Will we manage to achieve harmonious development that encompasses all the Earth's assets be they physical, environmental, cultural, historical, social or human?

Better Cities, better life, the theme of this Expo is our goal at UN-HABITAT. And I am very proud indeed that our agency has taken on the leading role at the magnificent United Nations pavilion in Shanghai.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The positives cited above were also contrasted by a number of negatives.

The continuation of bonded labor supported by slavery, child labor, work exploitation related to industrialization, imperialism and strong one-man rule are examples of the aspects that negatively characterize the 19th Century. Two world wars, many smaller regional conflicts, genocide and the ugly resurgence of intolerance, isolationism, racism and ethnic conflict– are all elements that distinguish the 20th Century. A severe worldwide economic depression that caused a massive disruption of the world economy is also a distinctive feature of last century.

If we want to live up to the idea of better cities, better life, we had better beware therefore: Current global trends indicate more recurrent and intense crises over resources such as water, energy and food. Likewise, ethnic conflicts, episodes of low-intensity conflict and terrorism will eventually rise with cities as their stage. Societies will be challenged with problems of ageing populations, such as the booming numbers of pensioners. Conversely the youth bulge will also challenge societies that will struggle to integrate them. It seems to be a certainty that

a persistent digital divide and asymmetrical access to knowledge and technology will affect negatively productive growth, competitiveness, employment and social cohesion of cities.

Perhaps this century will be known by increased inequality, poverty and exclusion. Different forms of deprivation and social marginalization will emerge and the conventional forms of poverty will intensify.

At the end of this century, if no corrective action is taken, UN-HABITAT projections show that there will be 1.5 billion people living in slums and other sub-standard housing. This continent, Asia alone, will account for more than 800 million of these people. This number is larger than the whole population of Europe today.

How many of us realise that 55 million new slum dwellers have been added to the global urban population since 2000? It troubles me deeply to have to tell you here sub-Saharan Africa today has a slum population of 199.5 million representing 61.7 percent of its urban population. This is followed by South Asia with 190.7 million in slums making up 35 percent of urban residents, East Asia with 189.6 million (28.2 percent), Latin America and the Caribbean with 110.7 million (23.5 percent), Southeast Asia with 88.9 million (31 percent), West Asia with 35 million (24.6 percent), North Africa with 11.8 million (13.3 percent)

It is unacceptable that today there are still about 1 billion people living in slums and other sub-standard housing.

I now wish to go on to the matter of climate change. One of the most pressing global problems of our planet, it is no coincidence that global climate change has become a leading international development issue at the same time as the world has become urbanized. The way we plan, manage, operate and consume energy in our cities will have a critical role in our quest to reverse climate change and its impact.

Seventy-five percent of commercial energy is consumed in urban and peri-urban areas. In addition, 80% of all waste is generated from our cities and up to 60 percent of Greenhouse Gas Emissions which cause global climate change emanate from cities.

There have been recently warnings that the sea level is rising twice as fast as was forecast, threatening hundreds of millions of people living in deltas, low-lying areas and small island states. But the threat of sea-level rise to cities is only one piece of the puzzle. More extreme weather patterns such as intense storms are another. Tropical cyclones and storms, in the past two years alone, have affected some 120 million people around the world, mostly in developing and least developed countries. Indeed, in some parts of the world, inland flooding is occurring more often and on a more intense basis.

Indeed it is people living in urban poverty who suffer most from natural disasters, especially the women and the children they support. For them, the climate is already out of control and, perhaps equally important, beyond comprehension.

If sea levels rise by just one meter, many major coastal cities will be under threat: Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Los Angeles, New York, Lagos, Alexandria-Cairo, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Shanghai, Osaka-Kobe and Tokyo, just to mention some mega cities that are under imminent threat.

The UN predicts that there will be millions of environmental migrants by 2020, and climate change is one of the major drivers.

As you visit the wonderful United Nations pavilion, I hope that it will leave you with a sense not only of where we are going in this daunting new world, but also that it will give you a sense of where we can go into a better and smarter urban future where everybody feels they belong in the city. We have the solutions and the science to solve many of these problems, and I know that here in Shanghai we will also get a fascinating glimpse into how wonderful the future can be if we get it right.

I am delighted that the theme, Better City, Better Life celebrates urban civilization and cities in particular as the greatest achievements of humanity. And, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate you for selecting this important idea.

We at UN-HABITAT and in the wider UN system fully endorse the concept of the City of Harmony proposed by this Expo. The theme of the Fourth session of the World Urban Forum co-organized by the Chinese Government and our Agency, held in Nanjing in 2008, was precisely on Harmonious Urbanization, a concept inspired by ancient Chinese philosophy which espouses moderation and balance in all things. UN-HABITAT has adopted the concept of Harmonious Cities. We have focused our work in three key areas: spatial or regional harmony; social and economic harmony and environmental harmony.

It is expected that visitors will learn to create eco-friendly societies and achieve and maintain sustainable development. I do agree therefore with Dr. Awni Behnam, the UN Commissioner General, who said he could not think of a better place than Shanghai, to be more representative of positive urban development.

Shanghai is one of the first cities in the developing world that acquired a meta-city status with more than 20 million inhabitants, including a floating population of more than 3 million. This was just confirmed a couple of weeks ago by Mayor Han Zheng. The transformation of this city takes my breath away.

Such is the huge organization, the giant scale of the Expo, the massive works that have forever changed this huge city that the superlatives roll off one after another: A 40 billion budget – double the cost of the Beijing Olympics two years ago, according to the media; new parks and new roads, with seven water entrances alone to the various Expo sites; a new metro rail system easily rivalling those of London, Paris, New York or Moscow; two new airports, and the famous Shanghai Bund transformed forever into a 21st century metropolis. And there's more: I see on the official website that we expect 70 million people to visit in the six months that this Expo is on.

Since the adoption of your Three-year action plan, the city is moving fast in energy saving and reducing emissions. To give an example, the requirement that new buildings completed in 2010 must consume 50 percent less energy and emit 50 percent less pollutant than those completed before. Here, inside the Expo, we are all pleasantly surprised that all traffic systems produce zero emissions and the main artery through the site operates as a low-carbon and environmentally friendly corridor. It does not come as surprise therefore that in this century Shanghai will be one of the top three or four cities in the world.

With Expo sites built on both sides of the Huangpu River, for centuries one of China's main gateways to the outside world, the city has so much to be proud of and to show us.

The tradition of such Expos started in Britain with the Great Exhibition of 1851 when that country showed off its global power at the height of the Industrial Revolution. Now Shanghai is having its turn at the end of nearly a century of revolutionary change that is seeing the world's most populous country emerge as a superpower.

There is a famous motto in the history of these great exhibitions: "Everything starts with the World Expo". In 1851, London exhibited steam engines and the telegraph for the first time, ushering a new epoch of progress. Since then, World Expos have been held more than 130 times in nearly 30 countries. Each has shown us marvellous new inventions and technology. To name some – the typewriter in Chicago in 1876; the telephone in Paris in 1878; television in New York in 1939; space travel in Seattle in 1962; touch screens in Knoxville in 1982; and the monorail in Vancouver in 1986.

I cannot wait to see what this great house of wonders here in Shanghai holds for us and our urban future. With more than 30 years experience in sustainable urban development, it is my hope too that we in the United Nations will showcase this accumulated wisdom in the most interesting way possible, that we will leave our visitors with much food for thought.

To us, a smart city is responsive to the needs and aspirations of its residents. It offers accessible, affordable and quality education and healthcare systems; sustainable, innovative and safe transport for all. It creates conditions to provide adequate housing and basic services and strives to improve the housing conditions of the urban poor. The city promotes the growth, preservation, and development of recreation services, parks, and green spaces to enrich the leisure needs of its inhabitants, with pedestrian walkways and bicycling lanes. A city with better quality of life creates a safe environment that protects its residents from accidents and different forms of crime and violence.

An eco-friendly city uses energy efficiently. It reduces and recycles as much waste as possible. It also promotes strong environmental ethics for people to understand environmental issues to live better, greener lives. A smart environmental city enacts green principles of city planning, supporting the development of green building policies that use eco-friendly materials and building techniques. This all helps cities can mitigate or reverse the impacts of climate change and they can also adapt to possible changes in the climate system.

A city with economic opportunities and shared prosperity for all uses its geographic location and comparative advantages to promote employment and attract new business through a business-friendly environment and good quality of life. It stimulates sustained economic growth for the urban poor and underprivileged populations.

A city with sound knowledge and information management systems taps the huge potential of information technology to keep its citizens connected, develop trade and commerce, improve governance and city management, deliver better municipal services and to improve entertainment.

A city of enhanced political and cultural inclusion brings the government to the reach of the ordinary people through enhanced mutual engagement. It tries out new modes of political participation, creating permanent platforms for dialogue and negotiation. It uses culture as a

tool of development, as a means of integrating ethnic minorities, preserve regional values, safeguard linguistic and religious diversity, resolve conflicts, protect the heritage and the built environment, and in the process promote economic development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is important that we make our dream of a wonderful urban future, of better cities, better life, a reality.

As we carry the torch for a sustainable urban future, we need the support of all of you more than ever. We cannot do it alone. Governments cannot do it alone. Cities, big business and civil society cannot do it alone.

And so it gives me great pleasure to announce that we have been working hard on the new idea for better, smarter, greener and more equitable, welcoming cities: the new World Urban Campaign. It will be led by 100 cities spreading their best ideas to more and more cities around the world. I invite this great city of Shanghai to join our campaign and to help us lead the process. You have so much to teach us!

I would now like to conclude with a special word of appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of China, and the city of Shanghai, for accommodating the UN system here, and for making the dream of a wonderful Expo a reality that just takes the breath away!

Thank you