

Address by
Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT
at the joint opening plenary
of the Singapore International Water Week and the World Cities Summit
in Singapore, Tuesday 29 June 2010

Mr. Mah Bow Tan, Minister for National Development, Singapore
Dr. Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, Singapore,
Professor Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore,
Your Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is great honour for me to address this joint opening session of the Singapore International Water Week and the World Cities Summit. I would like to congratulate the organizers of these two parallel events for selecting the theme, *Sustainable Cities: Leadership and Governance*. And so without a moment's delay, allow me to publicly honour Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew for the vision in turning this great city into one of the world's models when it comes to leadership, governance, and I will add, sustainability.

I am delighted to be here because this great modern wonder of the Asia-Pacific region inspires me with a renewed sense of optimism and hope. Singapore is a shining example of a newly sustainable, inclusive, friendly, greener and welcoming city. I congratulate you and the city leaders for this great achievement!

A brief look at UN-HABITAT

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This occasion marks almost 10 years since the start of my tenure at the helm of UN-HABITAT. It has been a decade that brought us into a new urban era in which half of humanity are living in towns and cities. It is projected that by 2030 that figure will rise to two-thirds. We live at a time of unprecedented, rapid, and irreversible urbanization.

As the only United Nations agency which deals with the built environment – the towns, cities and villages where we all live today - and the most important urban dimension of climate change, the challenge has been daunting.

It has been most important to keep closely in touch our global network of urban partners in governments and municipal offices, hundreds of non-governmental organizations, schools,

universities, and companies which strive for smarter, sustainable cities; for human rights cities where all feel they belong equally; for cities where women feel safe; for cities where the women and the children they support can get clean water and sanitation and the right to health services, utilities, an education, clean streets, green parks.

We have been doing this through our biennial World Urban Forum. We have just concluded the fifth session in Rio de Janeiro and I will share briefly some of the outcomes.

A look at slums, facts and figures

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The continuing worldwide impact of climate change, compounded by the global financial crisis, conflicts in many countries and migration patterns accelerating the rate of urbanization, are taxing us more and more.

The financial crisis and the growing number of disasters wrought by climate change threaten to undo and possibly reverse many of the gains made on achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction.

Yet I stand before you with a renewed sense of optimism. Our latest flagship report, the *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011* shows that a total of 227 million people in the world have moved out of slum conditions since 2000. This means that governments have collectively surpassed the Millennium Development Goal on slums more than two times over. It means our work and our campaign has paid off.

However, while this is welcome, the overall reduction in the world's urban divide still requires greater effort since the absolute number of slum dwellers has actually increased, with 55 million new slum dwellers added to the global urban population since 2000. This means that progress on the millennium slum target has simply not been enough to counter the growth of informal settlements in the developing world.

This is unsatisfactory. It is inadequate, and it can lead to social danger.

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), and Oceania with six million who constitute 24.1 percent of the urban population.

In this region, look at some of Asia's megacities such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Manila, and Bangkok, all with populations of over 10 million people: A third to half of them live in slums.

In many developing countries of the Asia-Pacific, we face a growing urgency to come up with creative and sustainable solutions. These start with leadership, governance and the political will forged in a change of mindset about how we view slums and those living in urban poverty; about whether we consider them a physical problem, or whether we accept them as an integral part of our cities.

We can say with our considerable experience that there is much to harness in the social, economic and physical potential of these communities if we put the people themselves at the centre of development, and consider them an integral part of society.

Community and civil society movements in Asia have grown with the assistance of UN-HABITAT, and its NGO partners such as the Asian Coalition of Housing Rights, and Slum Dwellers International, to cite two examples. Today we have new community housing drives being promoted in Thailand, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Mongolia among others.

How did Singapore scale up and provide housing access to its own urban poor? What are the key policy tools and reforms, and how can they be transferred? I know how rich the research material is, but we need to bring some of these ideas to a wider international audience.

A look at watsan facts and figures

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now wish to turn briefly to the water and sanitation situation. Although the Asia Pacific region as a whole is an early achiever of the millennium target for safe drinking water, it may not reach the sanitation target by the 2015 deadline for attaining the Millennium Development Goals set by our own governments.

For a region likely to serve as the engine capable of pulling the global economy out of the recession, water problems still abound. Water resources in the region are unevenly distributed and availability is complicated by physical, economic, and environmental scarcity. Further, pollution, inadequate management, poor governance and climate change imperil fresh water resources in the Asia Pacific rivers basins, watersheds, wetlands and ecosystems.

An estimated 494 million people are without access to safe drinking water, and 1.9 billion in Asia and the Pacific still lack access to improved sanitation. Fifty-six percent of people not using an improved source of drinking water live in Asia.

Vulnerable cities need to prepare their infrastructure for the impacts of climate change. If sea levels rise by just one metre, many major and smaller coastal cities will be under threat, not to mention small island nations: Mumbai, Kolkata, Shanghai, Osaka-Kobe and Tokyo just to mention a few in this region.

I know that Singapore has planned and built very carefully to keep itself off the one-metre vulnerability list as far as possible. This too is a lesson to share with the wider international community.

financing,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have one final message today.

Cities serve as the engines of economic growth, and most cities in this region are economically powerful. Yet many municipal governments remain poor, with the rate of urbanization much higher than the financing capacity of municipalities to provide adequate infrastructure in many developing countries.

Indeed, many municipal governments lack the power to raise revenue and to control their own financial resources.

There are gaps between the needs of urban infrastructure, slum upgrading, water, sanitation and other service delivery, and the current level of investment in many cities of this region, and especially in South Asia. If we want to attract the business sector to get actively involved in financing urban infrastructure, local governments must be empowered to raise and manage their own resources.

Key determinants here are governance reforms through decentralisation and the empowerment of local governments. We need courageous leadership and legislative reforms if we are to truly open access to innovative urban infrastructure financing schemes.

Yet I am optimistic that in all of these spheres, the situation will improve. It is clear to me having attended the just-concluded third Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development in Solo, Indonesia, that these matters are being taken very much to heart at the highest level.

World Urban Campaign conclusion

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

By holding this meeting Singapore is showing us how important it considers the urban agenda. The theme *better cities, better life* chosen for Shanghai World Expo has also served to raise the bar still further. I am proud that UN-HABITAT is the lead agency at the UN pavillion where so many of these matters are being brought to a global audience.

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 our new World Urban Campaign for better, smarter, greener and more equitable, welcoming cities.

It will be led by 100 cities spreading their best ideas to more and more cities around the world. And it gives me great pleasure to invite model city Singapore to join the campaign in a leading role as part of the legacy of the Singapore International Water Week and the World Cities Summit.

Once again, I congratulate Singapore, its people and its leaders for what you have achieved. The discussions here this week will feed into and enrich the next session of the World Urban Forum. It will be held in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which like Singapore, is another very successful urban trend setter.

And please, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as we get down to work at this meeting, lets keep the urban poor, the jobless young people in poverty, the woman and the children they support uppermost in our minds.

Thank you