Mr. Chair,

We align ourselves with the statement of Algeria made on behalf of the G77 and China. My delegation commends the Secretary General for his comprehensive reports under agenda item 21. We also thank Dr. Joan Close, Under Secretary General and Executive Director, UN-HABITAT for his statement.

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, I would like to register our heartfelt sorrow for those who lost their invaluable lives in the onslaught of the Hurricane Sandy. My deepest sympathy goes to the bereaved families and those who have been victim of the super-storm Sandy physically and economically. The Sandy saga is, unfortunate though, most topical and relevant affair of today's agenda. This erratic climatic behavior once again reminds us of ensuring sustainable human settlements in a progressively worsening global climate change. Therefore, once again we reiterate our demand that the global community and leadership should focus climate issues with more seriousness.

The twin objectives of the Habitat Agenda, such as “shelter for all” and “sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world” are critically important. The new and emerging challenges, particularly increasing intensity of disasters underscore the greater importance of the human settlements dimension of sustainable development.

The Millennium Development Goals have set special target of achieving significant improvement in the lives of at least 850 million slum-dwellers by 2020 as well as to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The World Summit Outcome 2005 has recognized the urgent need for increased resources to ensure affordable housing and housing-related infrastructure. In our country owing to erratic climate change, more and more people are being uprooted from their homes and moving to cities and towns creating more urban slumps.
With the advancing pace of globalization in a changing demographic and socio-economic dimension, half of the world's population is now living in urban areas. It is projected that by the year 2030, two thirds of the global population will be living in urban areas. This trend will cause further expansion of slums, lack of basic services, including water and sanitation as well as transformation in consumption and production patterns at national and global levels. Developing countries, particularly the LDCs are facing significant challenges in achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability in both urban and rural areas.

The poor and the destitute have been the bearer of the major brunt of the ongoing impact of major global crises such economic and financial meltdown, food and fuel crisis, climate change, share market debacle and the like. The combined effects of these crises have resulted in unprecedented urban poverty, malnutrition, health hazards and environmental degradation in many least developed countries. A concerted and integrated approach is, thus, needed to address the social, economic and environmental challenges posed by these multiple crises.

We appreciate UN-Habitat for its catalytic role in the coordinated implementation of the Habitat Agenda and related MDGs, especially target 10 on water and sanitation and target 11 on slum upgrading. We are encouraged by the adoption of the UN-Habitat Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan for the period 2008–2013. We have noted with interests that the sustainable urbanization has been placed at the center of this Strategic Plan.

We have noted that the UN-HABITAT has made some progress in its resource mobilization efforts. However, the total resources are far from adequate to implement its core mandates. The minimal share in core resources, unpredictability of funding and dependency on a small number of donors are some of the big challenges for effective functioning of this agency. We need to ensure that the resource base of UN-Habitat is expanded to facilitate the implementation of its mandate.

We believe every nation should integrate sustainable urbanization into the national development strategies. It should also be mainstreamed in the operational activities of the United Nations. However, it should not be at the cost of rural development, social safety net and most importantly basic health and education facilities. In the era of globalization, urbanization should in no way be inhibited, but it should be in a programmed way lest it jeopardize the architecture of the cities and the country all together. A planned urbanization entails, not to speak, basic services and employment opportunities. So, without international help and assistance, developing countries, particularly LDCs hardly can execute Habitat plan in a resource constraint setting.

Sustainable urban development should be based on environmentally sound technologies. While cities only occupy just over 2 per cent of land, they currently produce 70 per cent of waste and account for an equal proportion of greenhouse gas emissions. Environmentally sound basic urban infrastructure and services are therefore critically important to ensure an environment friendly urbanization. This again needs national priority plan being fed by international assistance. Otherwise, the major cities of the developing countries may turn into big slums-like situation.
An estimate suggests that for the period 2005-2020, US$20 billion per year is required to attain MDG target 11 on slum upgrading and to prevent the future formation of slums. However, ODA to the urban sector has remained largely stagnant at US$ 2 billion per annum in real terms for the past decade. We need to increase the resource base of the UN-Habitat and the Human Settlements Foundation for slum upgrading, slum prevention and pro-poor water and sanitation in urban areas. We call upon the developed countries to increase their flow of ODA in support of pro-poor housing and urban development in developing countries.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, we feel that the concerns of the most vulnerable countries, especially LDCs should be reflected categorically in any UN reports dealing with Habitat issues. The LDCs are lagging behind in infrastructural development which is, not to speak, the major bottleneck to their other development endeavors. The road communication, port facilities, energy, electricity, waste and water management, telephone and land management all in one hand have led to poor and unplanned urbanization in these countries, on the other hand, have throttled the wheel of industrialization and development in these countries. Their proportionate investments in housing and basic urban infrastructure remain far behind the level of demographic growth and the physical expansion of towns and cities. The basic reason of this lagging behind is basically due to their inability to finance the Habitat projects. Secondly, we have noted with concern that they are not receiving adequate international support as well. Unfortunately, the reports of the Secretary General under Habitat item lacked these specific information on the LDCs especially the resource gaps. We hope, in future, these problems will surface and surface prominently through disintegrated data and information, for millions of people that are living in slums or nearly slum-like environment having no minimal standard of living, poor situation, poor water supply, poor waste management and the like.

I thank you Mr. Chair.