Welcome Address

by

Dr. Joan Clos,

Under-Secretary General and

Executive Director

Nairobi, 15 April 2013
Your Excellency, Honourable Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya,
Hon. Ministers and Heads of Government Delegations,
Honourable Albert Nsengiyumva, President of the 23rd Session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat,
Distinguished Members of the Bureau of the 23rd Session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat,
The Head of the Public Service,
Permanent Secretaries,
Your Excellency, Ambassador **Chan-Woo Kim**, Chairperson of the CPR,
Distinguished Members of the CPR,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
My Colleagues, Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, Director-General of UNON, Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Amina J Mohammed, UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning,
Representatives of other Habitat Agenda Partners, including Professional Organizations, the Private Sector, Civil Society, local governments and their associations.
Distinguished Delegates,
Members of the Media,
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen --- all protocol observed.
It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you all to the 24th session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat. Your Excellency, President Uhuru Kenyatta, let me start by congratulating you for your election as President of the Republic of Kenya, and the People of Kenya for the exemplary manner in which the elections were conducted. We all are honoured by your presence here today. We are profoundly grateful for the support that we have always received from the Government of Kenya here at UN-Habitat.

I would also like to warmly welcome all the Honourable Ministers, Heads of Delegations and all participants who have come from different parts of the world to attend this session of the Governing Council. It is also my hope that you will find the preparations that we have made for this session adequate. Please do let us know if there are areas in which we could make improvements and progress.

Your support to UN-Habitat is crucial, especially as we begin to prepare for the Third United Nations Conference on Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in 2016. I wish to thank you most profoundly for the financial and moral support of your Governments to UN-Habitat over the years.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for the work done in preparing for this session of the Governing Council under the able leadership of Ambassador Chan-Woo Kim of the Republic of Korea. I am certain their work of the CPR will make the Governing Council’s discussions during this session easier.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence and support of my colleagues, Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, Director-General of UNON, and Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP which together make up the triangle of Executive Directors.

I would like to extend a special welcome to Ms. AminaJ. Mohammed, the United Nations Special Adviser on Post-2015. She has traveled from New York to share with us progress in the on-going United Nations preparations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Since the last session of the Governing Council, the Secretary-General has appointed our new Deputy Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Assistant-Secretary-General Ms. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, former Mayor of Kigali. I am delighted to introduce her to all of you and to welcome her warmly to her first Governing Council session.

I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the support that UN-Habitat has received from Habitat Agenda Partners over the years and underline their critical role vis-à-vis our work and the work of Governments.

I would like to extend a special welcome to members of the Advisory Group on Gender Issues, AGGI. They are attending a Governing Council session for the first time, and have already made a great difference in advancing women's empowerment and gender equality in sustainable urban development. Thank you for what you are doing, under the able leadership of your Chair, Dr. Traoré, the former Minister of Culture of Mali.
I am aware that many representatives of civil society, including grassroots organizations, professional organizations and the private sector are here with us. I welcome you all and thank you for your support.

We are particularly happy to see representatives of Slum Dwellers International here with us today, with whom we are starting a renewed partnership.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Minister, Permanent Secretaries, Distinguished Delegates, Governor of Nairobi County, I think you for your presence here today.

Allow me to address briefly two relevant issues. The first is the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). On 5 April, the Secretary-General of the United Nations called for accelerated action from Governments, international organizations and civil society groups in the next 1,000 days, it is already 990 days, to reach the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the deadline of the end of 2015.

Since the MDGs were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2000, extreme poverty has been cut by half globally. This is very good news and a success of the MDG strategy. Two billion more people have gained access to safe drinking water, which is also an outstanding global achievement. In addition, according to UN data, maternal and child mortality rates have dropped quite substantially. But, however, we continue to have many challenges in achieving the MDGs. The world continues to fight killer diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS. We also know that the sanitation target is presently far from being met, especially in urban areas and that many people are still in need of sanitation and drainage, in spite of the good progress made in other parts of the MDG.

As the Secretary-General said in his statement, we have met the quantitative target of improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers out of a total of 760 million in 2000. This is an achievement. But this figure hides a reality. This welcome cut has been dramatically surpassed by the increased number of new arrivals to the slums. The final result is that the total numbers of people living in slums have actually not diminished. On the contrary, it has increased from 760 million in 2000 to 863 million in 2012. In other words, the number of people joining slums has surpassed the numbers of those leaving them through national and international efforts.

Globally, we, the international community, the governments, civil society, must recognize that despite the effort made, we have not reached the point of stopping the growth of slum dwellers.

I therefore urge all Governments and Habitat Agenda partners to ensure that the MDG targets on slums and in water and sanitation are firmly kept in mind during the discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. It is critical that they are included, in one way or another, in the Post-2015 Agenda. At the same time, we all have a responsibility to continue working to make the most of the next thousand days and fulfill the millennium promise to the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people.
The second substantive issue that I would like to touch upon is the role of sustainable urbanization in development. We all know that cities and towns in developing countries are facing many important and serious problems. The challenges are here and are many.

Inadequate housing policies. Insufficient urban basic services; namely water, sanitation, drainage, sufficient energy and problems in transportation and mobility. Unemployment, especially among our youth. Expansion of the informal sector. Unplanned and often chaotic peri-urban expansion. Social and political conflict over land. High levels of vulnerability to natural disasters, partly as a result of climate change and other challenges.

In addition, rich countries, cities and towns are also facing a new series of challenges that were not thought of in the past. We see excessive and unsustainable energy consumption and increasing pockets of urban poverty. There is a new phenomenon of urban poverty, especially amongst youth. Also increased in inequality are manifesting themselves in new forms of segregation and increased divide between the rich and the poor.

Our work at UN-Habitat has shown that in developing countries, most of these challenges are not only the result of rapid urbanization, but also of the lack of proper urban policies to guide the process.

We have to remind ourselves that throughout history, urbanization has always been the process by which societies have been transformed to higher levels of development. In fact, we can assert that there is a proven, powerful and positive correlation between urbanization and development in spite of the challenges of urbanization. The experience of most of the BRIC and newly industrialized countries, including the big Asian economies, has demonstrated the power of urbanization as an engine of development. We are then facing a contradictory phase as we need to recognize the source of urbanization as a source of development.

The strategic goal of UN-Habitat for the next six years or so is to promote the role of urbanization in achieving sustainable development. In doing so, we are building on governments’ recognition in the Rio+20 outcome document, that was also mentioned by the Secretary-General. This includes the recognition that if, cities are well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, they can promote prosperity and increased livelihoods for the future generations.

We hope that this thinking will continue to inform the preparatory process for the post 2015 development agenda, and the 2016 Habitat III Conference. This will present the first opportunity to analyze its implementing strategy, bringing into account the important role that local governments have to bring the development agenda into reality. I would like to mention again the new disposals of the Kenyan constitution in improving and enforcing the role of local governments.

What we are asked to do together is to facilitate equitable access to adequate housing and basic services. Provide mobility for our citizens. Create an enabling environment for economic activity and job creation to enhance cities’ resilience to natural disasters, and promotion of sustainable energy uses.
At the same time, the goal of social inclusion and citizen participation must be equally supported and sound regulatory frameworks and land management principles to deliver adequate shelter for all must also be pursued.

It is my hope that, working together, we can move away from the perception of urbanization as a problem. Urbanization as something to always be avoided. We need to move towards a new and more positive view of urbanization as an opportunity and a sustainable source of development.

Mr. President, I would like to conclude by appealing to member States and Habitat Agenda partners for strong political and financial support to the work of UN-Habitat. Habitat III is offering us an excellent opportunity to move forward, setting a new urban agenda for the next twenty years. Remember that Habitat II was celebrated 20 years and now is a good opportunity to renew the urban agenda all over the world. This must constantly be informed by the shaping and implementation of post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. We need your engagement in the process towards a successful Habitat III Conference, one of the first global conferences that will be held after the definition of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

On our part, we stand ready to struggle against poverty and to support Governments, National Governments and Local Governments, and Habitat partners in the pursuing of a better life for our citizens.

I wish us all successful deliberations over the next coming four days. Thank you very much for your attention.