

BRAZIL

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Governing Council,

The choice of the topic "the role of cities in creating improved economic opportunities for all, with special reference to youth and gender" reflects the main challenge faced by governments during the current crisis. The contribution of cities to national economic growth is unequivocal; the fact that economic activities taking place in urban settlements account for a considerable share of a country's wealth is already quite well documented. The question we should ask ourselves, as national Government representatives and local authorities, is what we can do to enhance this potential through our policies; moreover, how can we ensure that economic growth is enjoyed in tandem with the imperatives of social equity and sustainable development.

Overarching interventions that can effectively address the three dimensions of urban sustainable development - social, economic and environmental - require a thorough planning exercise and active policymaking. This is why the Executive Director's initiative to propose a new urban agenda, anchored in the elaboration of national and local urban policies, is welcome. We hope this novel approach will set the tone for the Habitat III Conference.

We renew our support to the Global Housing Strategy to the Year 2025, which promotes the formulation of national and local housing policies. Brazil has already done its homework: after the establishment of the Ministry of Cities, in 2004, we have launched an inclusive participatory process that resulted in the adoption of a National Housing Policy.

The assessments that prepared the ground for our National Housing Policy revealed that Brazil had a deficit of about 7 million housing units. In response to that, the Brazilian Government launched, in 2009, a program called "Minha Casa, Minha Vida" ("My House, My Life", in English), to which over 35 billion dollars were allocated. Part of that sum was invested in financing the construction of new housing units and the refurbishment of existing ones by civil society organizations and the private sector, notably small and mid-sized local building companies. It is a requirement of the program that the new and renovated units are serviced by an adequate infrastructure in terms of sanitation, drainage and roads. The remainder of the funds was channeled to subsidized credit lines offered to low and middle

income families, with a monthly income not superior to 2500 dollars, willing to purchase one of the new or renovated housing units. One million housing units were already built or refurbished; our goal is to surpass the 2 million mark until the end of 2014. Recalling the theme of our session, this showcases the positive economic impact of urban policies: it is estimated that the "My House, My Life" program resulted in the creation of 1.4 million new jobs and generated an increase in the Brazilian GDP in the order of 0.8%. Women and youth were particularly benefited, since women have priority in accessing the subsidized credit lines and young persons filled the majority of the newly created employment posts.

Brazil can also offer some examples of local urban policies leading to improved economic opportunities. The Municipality of São Paulo, for instance, is planning to promote, through tax exemptions and other financial and legal mechanisms, the establishment of business hubs, furnished with adequate urban infrastructure, public education and health services, near to peripheral residential areas. The idea is to bring jobs and public services closer to the population, reducing mobility demands and improving the lives of city dwellers. São Paulo also aims at revamping degraded areas of the city center as residential neighborhoods, so that the underutilized equipment already in place is enjoyed in its full potential.

State agents should be mindful of the specific consequences of urban policies to women and young persons, since urban interventions can either hinder or foster their economic opportunities. In order to ensure that gender and youth are mainstreamed, it is important to have institutions devoted to these issues. The Brazilian Government has established Special Secretariats for Women and Youth, with the same status of Ministries, which have been working for the economic empowerment of those groups. We commend the establishment of the Advisory Group on Gender Issues, as well as UN-Habitat's engagement in efforts to increase youth participation in multilateral governance, which we fully support.

Last year, world leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro to discuss the challenges of sustainable development. Cities perform a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development; their importance was recognized by the inclusion of a whole section devoted to sustainable cities in the outcome document of the Rio+20 conference, entitled "The Future We Want". Cities are also an important issue under discussion 2015 Development Agenda. By subscribing to the Rabat Declaration, adopted in 2012, Brazil has

already signaled its commitment to halving its slum population between 2015 and 2030. The achievement of this goal must be undertaken hand in hand with the respect for the human rights of slum dwellers, by resorting, preferably, to slum upgrading initiatives which improve the infrastructure of existing settlements without disrupting their established social and spatial ties with the city. The urban agenda is a priority and we firmly believe in UN-Habitat's leading role in flagging innovative solutions to emerging challenges.

Thank you.