

Check against delivery

Intervention at the High Level Segment - UN Habitat Governing Council. 15 April 2013

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NORWAY

Mr President,

Let me first congratulate you and your colleagues in the Bureau with the election. I am sure that we - under your able leadership will bring our deliberations to a successful end.

Mr. President,

This 24th Governing Council of UN Habitat is perhaps the most important for many years. The world is experiencing economical setbacks. We are at the same time facing severe challenges to bring the world on track towards a sustainable development, environmentally, economically and socially.

At the human settlement arena we can observe that even

though the Millennium Development Goal on slums has been obtained, we are far from solving the challenges. In many countries they are still expanding. The gap between rich and poor in developing, as well in developed countries, widens up. We are still developing cities and other human settlements in unsustainable manners.

In this rather gloomy situation, the only programme within the UN system dealing with human settlements – UN Habitat – is in risk of becoming more marginalized than before. The donor base is weak, the core funding is declining and the Programme – one of the smallest in the UN family – have difficulties in fulfilling their mandate in a proper and satisfactory way. The funding profile also weakens the Governing Council's possibilities to play a significant political role. The actual priorities of UN Habitat's work are to a large extent decided by others than the GC.

All this will easily create a negative spiral. Donor countries may concentrate their overall declining contributions to other UN bodies or through other channels apparently more effective.

The outcome of this Governing Council *could* – and *should* – turn the negative trends and start to build a solid base for a stronger UN Habitat. A successful Habitat III in 2016 will be crucial. What we do from now and along the road towards Habitat III will be of utmost importance.

Mr. President.

Let me seize the opportunity to shortly mention what Norway consider to be the most critical issues that to be discussed and agreed upon at this governing council:

Firstly: It is of significant importance that the GC decides on a reform of UN-Habitat's governance structure. Member states must get a better oversight of the project portfolio in order to strengthen the linkages between normative and

operational activities. The resolution on governance and other GC resolutions should emphasize the importance of cooperation with other UN-agencies and relevant multilateral organizations outside the UN family, and to further develop the role of local authorities and civil society.

Secondly: Norway welcomes the new Resource

Mobilization Strategy. It is particularly encouraging that UN-Habitat is focusing on mobilizing a broader and stronger base of core donors. We would like to see clear references to this efforts both in the resolutions on governance and work plan/budget. The Strategy makes a business case for increased support. It should be followed by concrete initiatives as soon as possible.

Thirdly: Strategic urban planning is a prerequisite for avoiding unnecessary urban sprawl, promoting energy efficient transport systems and buildings, improving solid waste management, and water and sanitation services. Better

urban planning can contribute to a greener economy by promoting resource efficiency, reducing green gas emissions and at the same time create more productive and liveable cities. Planning is also necessary to combat urban poverty - and housing strategies and slumupgrading should be an integrated part of the planning processes.

Cities and other human settlements will not be sustainable unless we plan for it, and planning for sustainable human settlements will not be achievable unless concrete plans are worked out at the local level, involving all the Habitat Agenda partners. We – representing national governments – have to see to that local governments will have the capacity, skills and authority to tackle this important task. Earlier Governing Councils have decided upon the Guidelines on Decentralization and Strengthening of Local Authorities as well as on Basic Urban Services. Here we have two sets of tools that enable national governments to create a framework for an effective implementation of sustainable human settlements.

Let us use the preparations to Habitat III, and the conference itself, to promote these guidelines and implement them at the local level.

Fourthly – and lastly Mr. President, Norway has been engaged in working for strengthening of the role of Youth and on women and gender equality at many earlier Governing Councils. We will continue to do so at this 24th GC. Neither women nor the youth are in themselves vulnerable groups, but both are overrepresented in the weakest segments in most societies. There is still a lot to do before youth and women have reached their rightful status at the global, national and local arenas. This is a waste of opportunities and a barrier for economic growth. Let me end my intervention by appealing to all my colleagues in this room to assist women and youth to be agents of change at the human settlement arena.

I thank you, Mr President.

