

UNON Director-General's remarks at opening of UN-Habitat Governing Council session, 15 April 2013

Your Excellency Hon. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya,

Mr. Joan Clos, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat),

Mr. Achim Steiner, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP),

Hon. Albert Nsengiyumva, President of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat,

Mr. Francis Kimemia, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of Civil Service

Mr. Thuita Mwangi, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Tirop Kosgey, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Housing

Mr. Evans Kidero, Governor of Nairobi

Ms. Amina Mohamed, Deputy Executive Director of UNEP

Ms. Amina Mohammed, Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning

Hon. Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to the United Nations Office at Nairobi for the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat.

Allow me first to congratulate you, Mr. President, on behalf of the United Nations family in Kenya and on my own behalf, on your recent election as President of the Republic of Kenya, and to welcome you to UNON for your first out-of-office event since you were sworn in.

Excellency, your presence here today, only a few days after your inauguration as President, is a testament to the enduring partnership that exists between Kenya and the United Nations Organization.

The 2013 elections marked a key milestone in Kenya's progress and consolidation of democracy. It also marked an important step in the implementation of the country's new Constitution. The people and Government of Kenya are to be commended for the peaceful and orderly manner in which the elections were conducted and concluded.

The United Nations system looks forward to working closely with the new Government to support Kenya's efforts in poverty alleviation, development and good governance, among other areas.

Since its independence 50 years ago, Kenya has been a vital member of the United Nations. This is reflected in the fact that Kenya is home not only to UN-Habitat's global Headquarters, but also to the Headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as well as the only UN Headquarters in Africa and the global South -- the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

Here at the UNON complex, over 3,500 dedicated staff members from over 70 UN offices work on a daily basis to advance the values and goals of the United Nations -- from promoting sustainable urban development to protecting the environment, and from safeguarding peace and security to providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations.

This Governing Council is taking place at a very opportune time for the United Nations and for the Nairobi duty station.

Firstly, this meeting is taking place shortly after the first universal session of UNEP's Governing Council, which marked an important milestone in the strengthening and upgrading of UNEP and established Nairobi as the environmental capital of the world.

This is an important time in the United Nations' change management efforts led by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, which are aimed at reforming the way the UN does business so that it can more effectively meet the challenges of the 21st century and deliver vital services in the most efficient ways.

As part of these reforms, efforts are underway to consolidate some UN administrative functions at single locations. We strongly believe that Nairobi is well suited to become a location for such a global service delivery center. We are working hard to strengthen Nairobi's position as a global UN center of excellence.

We are also upgrading UNON's infrastructure and facilities to bring them up to the same standards as the other UN Headquarters in New York, Vienna, and Geneva.

I now have the honour of delivering the Secretary-General's message to this Governing Council session, which reads as follows:

"I am pleased to send greetings to the 24th UN-Habitat Governing Council.

You have an important role in building a sustainable future. With more than half the global population living in towns and cities, urbanization continues unabated. Most urban growth is in developing countries, where infrastructure is often inadequate, and meeting the needs of rapidly expanding urban populations, especially the young and the poor, presents formidable challenges.

Experience has shown that these challenges can be overcome. The Millennium Development Goals target of improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 has already been surpassed. However, because of rapid urbanization, there are more slum dwellers now than in 2000, often living without adequate sanitation or affordable access to safe water. As we look forward to the period post-2015, we must build on successes and attend to unfinished business so towns and cities can become models and drivers of sustainability.

Urban centres provide a major opportunity to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. Governments recognized this in the Rio+20 outcome when they stated that, 'through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies.'

UN-Habitat can provide critical support to Member States to realize these opportunities. I am encouraged that UN-Habitat's proposed Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 and biennial Programme Budget for 2014-2015, which the Governing Council is considering at this session, address both the challenges and opportunities of urbanization.

I hope, too, that the Governing Council will provide guidance to the Secretary-General of the Habitat III conference, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 67/216, and that the Council will advance the reform of the governance of UN-Habitat.

Please accept my best wishes for the success of your deliberations."

End of message. I thank you for your attention.
