Opening Remarks By Prof Samson K. Ongeri, Ambassador/ Permanent Representative of Kenya to the UN- Habitat During the Subcommittee on Program and Budget of UN- Habitat, March 14, 2016

Executive Director, Dr. Joan Clos,
Excellencies
Distinguished delegates

1. Good morning. Well, it is a great honour and pleasure to welcome all of you to this important meeting. Since it is our first formal subcommittee meeting taking place with Africa as chair, let me welcome you, on behalf of Africa, with this wonderful Swahili words.....Karibuni Sama!

2. You may have known that South Africa will be presiding over our meetings for the next 6 months. Mr. Johan Nel, the Deputy Permanent Representative of South Africa, is the incoming Chair. Currently, he is out of Nairobi due to prior engagements. I will be standing in until his return.

3. Colleagues, the last six months have seen tremendous progress in our work. We have held very rigorous and productive consultations on the governance review of Habitat. This has enabled us to know, and appreciate the gravity of the challenges facing the organization.
4. The discussions have also empowered us to understand the numerous potential opportunities for the organization, in building strategic partnerships, in improving on synergies and in areas of possible structural and programmatic improvements for better service delivery.

5. On behalf of the subcommittee, I wish to thank Mr. Tobias Glucksman, the Permanent Representative of the US to UNEP/UN-Habitat for ably steering our previous sessions. I also thank the Secretariat for the timely provision of documents we asked for, and for being there to clarify issues. I hope the Group will continue with the spirit.

6. At this juncture, let me draw your attention to the agenda items before us. As you all know, it was agreed and circulated well in advance of this meeting. Because there was consensus, I take it that the meeting wishes to proceed in that light. I hear no objections.

Very good!

7. Having said that, it is now my pleasure to invite the Secretariat to provide quick highlights on the status of the implementation of previous recommendations. We will appreciate updates on agenda item 1 (a-g). We should spend between 10-15 minutes on this.

Sir, the floor is yours
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2
8. Excellent. I am persuaded the sub-committee is moving in the right direction as far as execution of our mandate is concerned. There is need to sustain the passion, and to maintain the momentum in our work. These are of profound importance if we are to ensure full and effective implementation of the recommendations. I take it that we are all satisfied with the highlights provided, unless I see request for the floor............ Thank you!

9. Now, let me turn to agenda item no. 2 -discussion on how to make the UN-Habitat fit for purpose in the Post Habitat III Period. We all recall this is a continuation of reviewing governance structures of UN-Habitat to make it deliver effectively and efficiently its mandate.

10. What is different though is the proactive-forward-looking approach we have adopted in view of the new anticipated functions of the UN-Habitat. The first working note by the Bureau, that is, the Habitat III Zero Draft Outline has alluded to organizational arrangements for implementing the New Urban Agenda.

11. In my view, it would have been better if this discussion started a lot earlier so that the CPR could offer some useful inputs on improving the organization. Now, time is of essence, as the intergovernmental negotiations on the Zero Outcome Document are beginning next month in New York.
12. But be as it may, some political groupings have already pronounced themselves on this matter. Last month, as you may be aware, African Group met in Abuja, Nigeria at a Ministerial level. They agreed to strengthen the UN- Habitat in readiness for an expanded mandate. Other regions have either done, or are in the process of doing the same.

13. To me, the debate is very important and timely, because the opportunities and challenges associated with urban and rural areas have expanded in scope and complexity. Today urban centers are the main engines of economic growth. They are also home to nearly half of the world’s population. But they are also the main source of emissions causing climate change.

14. On the other hand, there are strong linkages between rural and urban centers. In fact, they mutually reinforce each other. For example, rural areas supply food and raw materials to cities, and in turn industries in cities process them in the process creating jobs and value addition. And we also know that not everybody will be living in urban centers.

These facts have been acknowledged by Heads of State and Government. That is why, last September, they agreed to “make cities and other human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (SDG-11). Paris Climate Agreement has called on all to combat climate change in cities. Quito will definitely approve new mandate to drive the New Urban Agenda.
15. These are important milestones. Realizing them will hinge on the financial, human, institutional and technological resources deployed. Therefore, we seek answers to:

i. What does the new urban agenda seek to achieve?

ii. Is UN-Habitat, in its present form, suitable to lead the world in realizing SDG 11, Paris Agreements and the objectives to be set in the New Urban Agenda?

iii. If not, what reforms are needed to enhance its capacity in normative and operational delivery?

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I believe this are thought provoking questions. Their answers will give clear indications of what we want to collectively achieve.

With those few remarks, I now open the floor for discussions.