Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Honourable Erna Solberg, Norway

World Urban Forum II, Barcelona 13-17 September 2004

Excellencies, Honourable participants,

Madam Chair,

It is a great honour for me to take part in the opening ceremony of the second World Urban Forum.

We have gathered here from all over the world, from all walks of life, to discuss urban challenges and search for solutions to the issues of inclusiveness and integration. We are here to exchange experiences, to form partnerships and alliances, and to gain courage and inspiration to meet one of the most critical challenges of our time; combating urban poverty.

Cities have at all times been multiethnic and multicultural meeting places and melting pots. They are “anthills” of activity and creativity. They are engines of economic growth, origin of scientific achievements, cultural advancements and social progress. City-life is in many ways “the good life”. But the world is urbanizing and
poverty is urbanizing. Most of the slum-dwellers and other vulnerable groups are excluded from “the good city life”. In many western cities we experience that citizens coming from non-European countries have severe difficulties in integrating into the city life. This is not tolerable and definitely not sustainable.

The challenges of managing sustainable urban development and eradicating urban poverty, segregation, exclusion, racism and conflicts are imminent and immense. No country so far has found solutions to these issues altogether.

However, the human right aspect – equal rights to an adequate standard of living – is the basis of our work. In order to achieve this important and far-reaching goal, participation of all is needed. We need the untapped resources and the experiences of women, youth, the poor and the marginalized. We need to develop cooperation between local authorities and civil society, and we need strategies for empowering and enabling all groups to participate in human settlements development.

Good governance and decentralization of authority and resources to local level is a prerequisite for a sustainable urban and human right-
based development. Norway would like to honour the efforts of UN-Habitat on this issue. UN-Habitat is working closely with the local government associations as well as civil society partners. At this World Urban Forum we will benefit from this close relationship. I have no doubt that our partners – all the Habitat Agenda Partners – many of them representing local knowledge based on local experiences – will highly enrich our discussions and later our future decisions.

In particular, I am pleased to see that this time we will be able to follow a Global Youth Congress as part of the Forum. The youth represents the present and the future. We have the responsibility to listen to their voices. We need to give them a say to build a meaningful future.

Human settlements issues are complex and our policies need to be based on holistic approaches involving all stakeholders and partners. The complexity of human settlements development could well be one of the reasons why it has been difficult to achieve recognition of sustainable urbanisation as critical factor for sustainable development in general. I am pleased to report that the latest session
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Let us remember and let us nd rline the rba isation process d th making pot f th cities also offer opportunities f reaking old patterns d encourage mtiati nd reativity Let us seize opportunities nd foc inclusiveness integration

would like to thank th cities of Barcel toger with th UN-H bita for arranging is porta en nd loo for rd to taki g part partic pati

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