Honourable Ms. Ella Vogelaar, Minister for Housing, Communities and Integration
Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT
Esteemed guests
Invited delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen:

To talk of development is to talk of the reason for the reproduction and progression of our existence as human beings, to talk of housing is to speak of the superiority of the human race above all other species. It is in the fulfillment of this assertion that we find our reason for being.

As the human race is ever more drawn and preoccupied with producing the conditions for wealth accumulation, a more powerful and enduring
collective concern has emerged that tempers this narrow drive for wealth that enquires for whom, how and to what end.

As we accumulate wealth, do we do that in the interest of securing a safer future for all of us, or do we do that in narrow self interests and thereby inadvertently creating the conditions where our safety is invariably undermined.

It is in moments like this that we gather to ask the awkward questions about our joint future: We have no doubt, by now that our future is an urban future. We know that for most of human kind it will be the only future. This conference will confirm that. The conference will also confirm what we already know about the conditions for the majority of people in this urban future. In the compounding urban assault that is driven by the hopes for millions and the confounding time frames of modernity these millions of people will find themselves in an urban whirlpool that drains them of all meaning and uncaringly castigates them to despair. For these it will essentially be life on the margins. Of that, we are convinced, for we have seen and experienced it.

Fortuitously, we gather from time to time to talk about it. From a common entry point, a lengthy and protracted process of gatherings of states over the last fifty years culminating in my country, South Africa in 2002, a declaration was produced which was to bind all of humanity to a sustainable and just future. In reducing it to its barest essentials, ‘The Declaration’ at the conclusion of the United Nations- World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) stated that the current trajectory of the modernization project for humanity was not sustainable. It set out the parameters for an alternative. It drew its inspiration from the gathering of the world’s leaders on the eve of the
Third Millennium that endorsed the MDGs. Both the Johannesburg declaration and the MDG’s were unambiguous on the task that lay ahead.

Building on the work of Boutros Boutros Galli the first African to lead the United Nations as Secretary General, Kofi Annan was the steward for this gathering of Nations at the close of the 20th Century. Significantly it was in Africa and we jointly agreed then that this was the beginnings of a Century of Hope. He led the gathering into an agreement that the future was an urban one, that required a plan of action to address poverty and inequality and ensured the designation of UN Habitat into a full programme of the United Nations under the leadership of yet another African-Ms Anna Tibaijuka.

Our continent was honoured, we indeed had a great deal to be proud of. This has thrust upon us, as Africans, the enormous responsibility not to fail, as we are so inextricably bound with these processes.

On my own behalf and on behalf of housing ministers of my continent, I am greatly honoured to have been asked to make this address. I want to express sincere gratitude to Madam Vogelaar for the invitation. It provides us an opportunity to affirm our responsibility and commitment that under our stewardship, the continent will resolve its housing problems. This as you know is a region where 72% of our urban population lives in slums … the highest percentage in the world and, if the MDGs are to have effect, we have to be at the forefront of this change for we are committed ourselves to give hope.
The world has come a long way since 2002 when we signed the Johannesburg declaration. By the end of the year 2005, thanks to the energetic and strategic intervention of the Executive Director, Ms Anna Tibaijuka, the World Summit of Heads of State, we had moved beyond the initial bland statement and have now firmly committed to achieving:

“significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020, recognizing the urgent need for the provision of increased resources for affordable housing and housing-related infrastructure, prioritizing slum prevention and slum upgrading...”

It has been a consistent progression on our part and a precise articulation of the needs of our period in sustainable urban development. We have increased our knowledge about the deprivation and the utter poverty that results when more than 200 million new slum dwellers are each year added to the world.

We are today confronted with the reality that even though the focus of our attention has consistently been on ensuring improvements in the living conditions of people around the world, our cities continue to present as sources of instability. It is clear that they are not able to cope with the process of urbanization that in its wake has created and exacerbated slum conditions particularly in the developing countries and created pockets of unease and disquiet in the developed world.
The context that this conference gives to the issue is particularly welcome, because it positions housing where it should be – the foundation of stability and security for our societies. A much needed emphasis as we consider the new thrust of all our energies: the creation of sustainable communities.

A few years ago, thirteen to be exact, my country attained democracy. We emerged from a situation that could not technically be termed a war, but whose impact was as devastating as a war situation. Within a period of five years of normality, the number of previously displaced people and previously deprived people requiring housing in the urban areas, was greater than that affected by lack of shelter after WWII in Europe.

This period of transition and reconstruction is hailed as the miracle of South Africa. We dealt with the pain and the truth of our past and elaborated laws to deal with inherited social and political injustices. This was the backbone of our reconstruction.

In retrospect, had we understood then the importance of housing as part of reconstruction, we would have needed to prioritise it in the same way that Europe prioritized it after WWII. We did not understand that our attempts at reconstruction and reconciliation would in time count for nothing, unless we dealt with the most pressing need of humanity – shelter. This is the problem that faces my country right now, the realization that shelter should have been dealt with as a critical part of the foundation of our reconstruction.
For us at the time, shelter was only one of the basket of social injustices of the past. As a result, even though we have made incredible strides by providing 10 million people with houses within this period of 13 years, we face an unprecedented challenge for millions more, some of whom of late have tended to vent their anger and frustration in public demonstrations. We failed to understand many years ago, that in order to deal with the injustices of the past, we had to urgently deal with the issue of the quality of life, and nowhere is the quality of life more measurable than in one’s own immediate environment.

We know now, not too late I hope, for our own situation, but certainly we can give advice to the international community that will from time to time be dealing with post-conflict situations: prioritise housing, whatever else is done, prioritise housing, for in the end that is a crucial part of the foundation for any post conflict development.

Ultimately peace is not only the absence of war, but the possibility of a better life. And a commitment from the citizenry that they will defend the peace is vital. That commitment is dependent on the extent of their feeling of having a stake in stability. There could be no greater buy-in from the citizens than the protection of one’s feeling of ownership of their own space that provides security.

In a broader context, relative to countries outside of a conflict situation, studies around the world have shown the critical link between housing and security.
What both the developed and developing countries are contending with, as a consequence of urbanisation is rising inequality and marginalisation. In the cities of developing countries, this visibly manifests itself in the form of a rise in slum developments, and in the developed countries, manifests itself predominantly in pockets of exclusion and an affordability challenge.

The history of housing in developed countries is replete with housing projects that became monumental disasters.

Renowned architect and urban designer Oscar Newman (1996) witnessed the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe and later indicated that this experience was instrumental in provoking his thinking on how to create environments which worked for poor people. And it was Newman who coined the term “defensible space” and who developed a set of design principles which are widely used by urban designers today in order to create such defensible space. Central to the concept of defensible space is the notion of territoriality and claim to territory. He articulated his thoughts very simply:

“A family’s claim to a territory diminishes proportionally as the number of families who share that claim increases. The larger the number of people who share a territory, the less each individual feels rights to it. The larger the number of people who share a communal space, the more difficult it is for people to identify it as theirs or to feel they have a right to control or determine the activity taking place within it.”

However my primary purpose here today is not to ponder on or to espouse the theories of Oscar Newman, but to emphasise the relationship
between the way in which we shape and manage our housing environments and the extent to which those environments contribute to safer cities. Moreover it is important to recognize that in initiatives to make cities safer in many parts of the world it is becoming increasingly commonplace for such initiatives to have an “environmental component” in which the principles of defensible space are very important.

This is what we too in the developing world have come to accept.

Let me again turn to the experience in South Africa where dealing with high levels of criminality and creating safer environments is indeed a priority. South Africa has had a National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) for a number of years now. A key feature of the NCPS has been its focus on preventive as opposed to reactive measures. Our strategy hinges on housing as a major component, accompanied by focus on the “environment” (e.g. street lighting programmes, community policing, defensible space initiatives. local economic development etc).

Pivotaly our crime prevention strategy is based on the assumption that with decent houses, people have a greater responsibility toward defense of their space, have greater participation in protecting this space.

The inclusion of the “environment” focus is a clear acknowledgement by government that making our cities safer is not just about policing. Moreover there is a strong recognition in the NCPS that the police cannot succeed in creating safer cities on their own.
The bulk of low income housing delivery in South Africa has taken the form of a “give away” incremental house. The house, whilst humble, is a good start. What is important from a pro-poor perspective is that the house takes the form of an asset which is owned by the beneficiary. Contemporary theory on poverty alleviation stresses the importance of assets in reducing the vulnerability of the poor (particularly to systemic shocks).

The housing asset provided can also be used to generate income. South Africa has had substantial success in delivering “give away” houses at scale and is behind only China and India when it comes to delivery rates (more than 2.4 million units have been produced since 1994 serving an estimated 10 million people or one fifth of the total population).

Whilst the relationship between housing and creating safer cities has been pursued in a largely indirect way via the delivery of housing at scale, the Safer Cities strategies of a number of cities do target certain “trouble-spots/unsafe areas” and single them out for focused attention.

While we accept that the vast majority of those living in informal areas are good citizens intent on getting a foothold into urban life, criminal elements also find the lack of formal governance and control in informal settlements very useful. A number of such settlements have in fact become no-go areas, not just for the police, but for all forms of governance. Thus it is not surprising that the upgrading and formalization of informal settlements is a high priority in South Africa and in other parts of the world.
I must come back to the present. This, I am sure is not where we imagined ourselves we would be when we started. The world we envisioned was where cities, given their present importance, in the context of globalization as centres of economic development, would realise the dreams of everyone.

We have woken up to the fact that economic development does not lead to social development, that in fact, inequality and poverty are on the increase. There can be no, we have had to confess, justification for capital accumulation and exploitation of natural resources unless it contributes to building better lives for mankind. We have to change the development trajectory if we hope to create just and safe cities. We have done this at our own peril. We have to change this and this as the most urgent challenge facing the global community in its implementation of that which we have committed ourselves to.

We could begin by restructuring our cities to enable more integration to take place. We have to focus on creating both sustainable human settlements and sustainable cities, and for this we are going to have to look at a much more varied urban morphology. It goes without saying such environments will need to take account of the principles of defensible space in a much more conscious way than has been the case to date.

We need to pay more attention to ensuring that our cities are a reflection of the world we yearn for, where poverty and marginalization are urgently addressed. Their consequences affect all who share that space. Through many forums such as these, we need to collectively commit ourselves to creating community and social cohesion. For finally, we each occupy the same geographic space and security can only be achieved through a common
purpose. History has taught us that building walls against, what we consider an unpleasant other, does not work, has not worked.

Modernity has inexorably drawn us into closer communion and our living spaces have to reflect what we have become.

I thank you.