STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE F. MHASHU, MINISTER OF NATIONAL HOUSING AND SOCIAL AMENITIES, AT THE SECOND SESSION OF THE GOVEMING COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME UN-HABITAT; 30 MARCH 2009 NAIROBI, KENYA.

MR PRESIDENT,
THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UN – HABITANT,
ANNA TIBAIJUKA
YOUR EXCELLENCIES
REPRESENTATIVES OF UN AGENCIES AND MULTILATERAL ORGANISATIONS
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS
INVITED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

May I in the first instance join the other speakers before me in congratulating you for being elected the President of the Second Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Commission
on Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). We are equally
grateful to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat for extending the
invitation to the inclusive Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe
to participate at this important meeting.

Mr President, you undoubtedly have a mammoth task before you, as
you are coming into office when the human settlements sector world
wide is faced with numerous challenges. This situation is likely to be
worsened by the current world economic recession which will see the
housing sector given the least priority.

Zimbabwe is not an exception, as there has not been any significant
investment in housing infrastructure during the past decade. The
general lack of off-site services in most of Zimbabwe’s urban centres
has affected urban growth resulting in serious cases of overcrowding.
A recent study on urban housing needs estimates the housing back-
log for the 29 major urban centres at 542630 housing units resulting
in an occupancy rate of 22 persons per 200 square metre stand in
highly populated settlements of Harare, Chitungwiza and Epworth.

The existing infrastructure is also calling for huge investment to
maintain it and upgrade it to meet the fast increasing urban
population. Our local authorities need to be capacitated in terms of
both human resources and construction equipment to enable them to undertake meaningful construction works.

Mr President, the inclusive Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe upholds the principles under which the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements was established and assures this august house of its total support in implementing the resolutions of this meeting. We are committed to continue with projects started by the previous government towards meeting the goals set under the Millenium Development Goals. We are also committed to the implementation of the recommendations of the Habitat Agenda, which among other things encourage national governments to adopt human settlements policies that facilitate the participation of other partners in housing development.

May I also inform this august house, that inline with the above policies, my Ministry has been very successful in mobilising other partners from the private sector, local authorities, non governmental organisations and community based organisations. The consultative process which will end up with a housing convention in May 2009 has already begun. The main objective of the housing convention will be to afford a forum for all stakeholders to have an input in the housing policy formulation process. This will enable the Ministry to understand the magnitude of the housing problem and map the way
forward. The Ministry of National Housing and Social Amenities of which I am the Minister, is grateful to the logistical support given by UN-Habitat in preparing for the housing convention.

Mr President, Zimbabwe is ready and committed to implementing the Millenium Development Goals inline with the resolutions of this august house and is appealing to sympathetic friends and other international institutions to support it’s endeavour by availing off-shore lines of credit in order to recapitalise building societies and local authorities to effectively play their roles in human settlements development. Zimbabwe has a very advanced private sector housing finance infrastructure which is dominated by building societies. The sector has however not been spared by the current economic difficulties facing the country. What is now required is bridging finance to enable the banks to kick-start the mortgage lending process. On the other hand our local authorities also lack the necessary capital to enable them to construct major off-site infrastructure works which now pose as the major constraint to urban expansion.

Ladies and gentlemen, aware of the role and responsibility placed on UN-Habitat and the insufficient resources at its disposal to effectively carry out its role, the Government of Zimbabwe supports the
previous resolutions which call upon the United Nations General
Assembly to increase its allocations to UN-Habitat. We equally call
upon member states to honour their pledges to the United Nations
Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation. I am aware that
Zimbabwe has for sometime not been contributing to this Fund but
would like to assure this august house that we will start the regular
contributions to the Human Settlements Foundation as soon as our
economic situation improves and this won’t be any longer.

Mr President, Zimbabwe subscribes to the resolution of the Twenty
First Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations
Commission on Human Settlements which recommends the
establishment of a National Housing Fund within the United Nations
and Human Settlements Foundation to be used for direct
intervention by UN-Habitat when and wherever there is a human
settlement crisis. This is necessary given the fact that the developing
world is experiencing an ever increasing rate of urban poverty and
that international capital is not attracted to invest in such conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Zimbabwe is fast urbanising at an average
rate of 7% per annum and thus creates lucrative opportunities for
land developers. I assure you that Zimbabwe is a safe destination for
investors who are interested in medium and up-market housing schemes. Investors are welcome to package their projects with local land developers and building societies of their choice. Government is considering a number of investment incentives that are attractive to foreign investment.

At this juncture, ladies and Gentlemen, I once again would want to reiterate our call for renewed co-operation with the international community in human settlements development. A friend in times of need is a friend indeed.

Mr President I wish you success during your term of office.

I thank you.