Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

I wish now to brief you on the actions we have taken so far on the preparations for the 23rd Session of the Governing Council (GC23) to be held in Nairobi from 11 to 15 April 2011.

The Working Group of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the Preparations for the Governing Council met last June, and was briefed on the overall picture of the Secretariat’s preparations for the upcoming Governing Council. The schedule and list of documents to be prepared for GC23 were among the documents shared with the CPR during this Working Group Meeting.

Excellencies,

It is my pleasure to inform you that the selection process of the theme for GC23 is on-going in consultation with the relevant parties. Please allow me to recall that in its resolution 20/21 of 8 April 2005, the Governing Council decided that the special themes of its future sessions shall be selected by the Bureau of the Governing Council on the basis of advice from the Executive Director in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR), taking into account the outcome of the sessions of the World Urban Forum. It should also take into account the continuing implementation of the goal of the Millennium Declaration to improve the lives of slum dwellers. The Secretariat has prepared a concept note on the theme for GC23: “Sustainable Urban Development: Equitable access to Land, Housing, Basic Services and Infrastructure”, which was shared with the CPR Chair and the Bureau last month. The CPR Bureau considered the concept note during its meeting on 30 August, and I understand that the proposed theme is now being forwarded to the President of the Governing Council, Hon. Minister Warmington of the Republic of Jamaica.

In furtherance of the above, the rationale for this theme is that UN-Habitat needs to prepare for the Rio+20 Conference taking place in 2012. The only Governing Council meeting before this event is GC23. Therefore, it is critical to have the key messages emanating from GC23 feed into the Rio+20 Conference to ensure that UN-Habitat's vision on sustainable urban development is mainstreamed into the global agenda.

Previous GC meetings focused on different issues namely: finance, economy, water, environment, and so on. Some dimensions of access to land and housing have been addressed in previous Governing Council sessions: secure tenure during GC 18; shelter strategies during GC 19; and housing finance during GC 22. However, there is now a need to address Access to Land and Housing within the framework of equitable and sustainable urban development.

This theme is most appropriate at this historic moment because land, housing, basic services and infrastructure underpin all of UN-Habitat's work in sustainable urban development and all existing focus areas, programmes and projects in the agency will easily link to the proposed theme.

Also, the theme does not stand alone. It unfolds from previous UN-Habitat activities and flagship events, including the Habitat Agenda and Istanbul Plan of Action, the MTSIP, the fifth Session of the World Urban Forum, the World Urban Campaign and the 100 Cities Initiative, the Global Land Tool Network and its various research activities, flagship reports...
and other normative work. The theme of GC 23 should also be part of, and linked to, this comprehensive vision.

The proposed GC theme also fits with a wide range of sub-themes and a strategic decision will need to be taken amongst potential inter-connected sub-themes. The sub-themes could be chosen from water, sanitation, governance, finance, local authorities, buildings, sustainable land management, building codes, local agenda 21, basic services, environment, energy, transport, and capacity building, among others.

The emphasis in the choice of themes should be on showing what the agency has done and learned in these areas, as well as our positions on these sub-themes.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

With the Governing Council meeting about seven months away, what is left for me to do now is to assure you that the preparatory activities for GC23 will be implemented on time and according to the planned schedule, as has been done in the past.

The Convocation letter for GC23 will be despatched today, as scheduled, and the notification letter by the Executive Director for GC23, as scheduled, will be sent out by the end of November 2010.

A series of meetings of the Working Group of the CPR are planned this year, in which the draft Work Programme and Budget 2012-2013, background documents as well as draft resolutions for GC 23 will be presented and discussed.

I thank you all for your attention.