Greetings

I wish to commend the Habitat Governing Council for taking the initiative to organize this Dialogue on the Special Theme of sustainable urban development through expanding equitable access to land, housing, basic services and infrastructure. It is an important conversation.

According to McKinsey, today, about 600 cities generate 60% of global GDP. Cities are the engines of our social and economic growth. Yet, in the context of sustainable development, there is both a point of contact and a point of collision as demographic shifts leading to rapid urbanisation and ad hoc and unplanned growth of cities takes place all over the globe.

The next few decades will see an unprecedented scale of urban growth in the developing world. This will be particularly notable in Africa and Asia where the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030. Here in Nairobi, for example, the expansion of the city is already evident. As rural dwellers and refugees head toward cities for a better life, many of these urban migrants will be poor, lacking education or the skills to generate wealth for themselves or for the community. In consequence cities will be hard pressed to provide basic services for these new populations. Rural agriculture will need to achieve productivity gains to feed the growing urban populations that are no

1 Unifem
longer connected to the land. This challenge will be made all the more complex by the rising prices of food all over the globe.

In the search for success and sustainability, cities will find themselves increasingly contending with challenges which are environmental and pertain to physical planning including the eradication of slum dwellings. Climate change and the risk of natural disasters will punish those cities that are not prepared for them. Cities are and will continue to be at the nexus of the global crises related to the economic recession, energy insecurity, water scarcity or flooding, high food prices, vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. Pressure will therefore mount to expand cities in a structured, strategic and well planned way with adequate consideration given to the competing interests in and uses of land. Already scarce and stressed natural resources will be in even greater demand and the competition between the brown economy and the green economy will liken heighten as cities grow and generate new activity and wealth. It is for this reason that sustainable urbanization is a key challenge that will be taken up by the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012.

**New Challenges and Opportunities Have Arisen**

Twenty years after the Earth Summit in Rio, issues of sustainable development are even more relevant today in the context of current global challenges, including those pertaining to cities. One thing that has changed is the nature of the challenges, pressures and insecurities that beset cities and rapid urban population growth rates lend a strong sense of urgency that these problems must be dealt with now.

**More Effective Urban Management is Needed.**

Given the new challenges, many cities are developing sustainability plans and policies but the number of these must be increased and the existing ones strengthened. There is a critical need for a new level of engagement between
politicians and stakeholders at the federal/national level and those at the local level. In addition, stakeholders must seek greater collaboration between the business sector, local and national governments and civil society which stresses improved CSR and a commitment to the ‘greening’ of business. Land use planning, a key challenge, has to focus on dense, mixed-use community development. While managers of the rapidly growing cities in developing countries, must pursue provision of basic services to under-served groups – specifically housing, water supply, wastewater treatment, energy, solid waste management, education and healthcare. These efforts can lead to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and a better quality of life for urban dwellers as well as generate economic benefits. Recent calamities in Japan (earthquake/tsunami), Brazil (rains/mudslides), and India (1 meter of rain in 24 hours in Mumbai) bear sombre testimony to the urgency and necessity with which cities need to plan for natural disaster risks, prevention and mitigation.

**Transform the Urban Economy From Brown to Green**

Urban leaders need to catalyze change through new economic and market development strategies, focusing wherever possible on the transition to a low-carbon future. The Rio+20 Conference theme of Green Economy which is aimed at eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development is of particular importance to city dwellers and planners and by extension to national economies. The creation of green spaces, green jobs, new approaches to business, a more sensitised business sector with a stronger sense of social responsibility, the greening of the energy, transport and housing sectors are all important policy approaches to achieving best practices in the new global green economy.

Governments and relevant finance institutions will have to develop dedicated financial mechanisms, soft loans, fiscal and financial incentives and the appropriate enabling environment to spur green investment and appropriate innovation in green technology. And don’t forget the social aspects. Apart from the proper management of environmental issues and the required physical
development planning, careful attention will have to be paid to logistics and transport issues since they wear significant implications for national growth and national GDP. Already it is estimated that 1.5% of the GDP of Colombo, Sri Lanka is lost as a result of logistical, and congestion difficulties due to traffic congestion and poor planning.\(^2\) Communications are also an important consideration. The transformation from a brown to a green economy will take place through the conscious and continuous integration of sustainable development principles and practices into national and local planning cycles.

\[\textbf{Culture is the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development and Can Be a Force for Urban Renewal}\]

We need to preserve tangible and intangible cultural heritage – these help to define a city’s unique identity and charm. Integration of diverse urban cultures leads to a pluralistic, multicultural city. Initiatives that develop creative industries and cultural tourism can regenerate run-down urban areas and reshape a city’s image. The preservation of a city’s physical and cultural heritage can be a powerful attractant for visitors and a source of significant revenues from tourism – London, Paris, Rome, Beijing, Washington, New York all boast of a vibrant tourism product based on the global interest in them as cities.

\[\textbf{Proposed Collaboration}\]

The Rio Secretariat acknowledges that UN Habitat, more than any other UN agency wears the mantle of responsibility for cities. Together with its broad network of partners, it can be a real force for change and innovation. Already in preparation for Rio+20, the major Intersessionals and PrepComms have been held. We have sought input and feedback from countries by way of a questionnaire sent to the capitals of member-states. The deadline for making contributions to the zero-draft document which will form the core of the negotiating text is November 1\(^{st}\) of this year and we urge member-states to make

---

\(^2\) Prof. A. Kumarage, University of Moratuwa
their contributions in a timely manner. The Governing Council of Habitat now has an opportunity to make a unique contribution to the text of the Rio+20 Conference document by sending the Secretariat text aimed at having issues relating to urbanisation and cities placed firmly on the radar of the intergovernmental agenda on sustainable development.

Speaking on behalf of the Conference Secretariat, I can say that we look forward to the contribution of UN HABITAT to the Rio process and to its invaluable work on cities, starting with this dialogue. Together let us ensure that Rio+20 is a success and captures the issues at the heart of sustainable development.

[Closing]