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**Statement by  
MR. THOMAS STELZER  
ASSISTANT-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLICY COORDINATION AND INTER-  
AGENCY AFFAIRS, REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE  
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Manama, Bahrain, 1 June 2008**

Your Highness,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate Bahrain for hosting the Regional Preparatory Meeting of the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review. It is a great pleasure to participate in this important dialogue. Allow me to briefly outline the challenges that the world at large is facing towards more sustainable urbanization, before I share with you my assessment of the specific challenges faced by your region and how we can all benefit from sharing your experiences at this year's Annual Ministerial Review.

Urbanization is not a new phenomenon, but the vast rise in the number of people making their homes in towns and cities is a recent feature. According to United Nations estimates, about 180,000 people are being added to the urban population every day. This means the world's urban infrastructure has to absorb the equivalent of the population of two Tokyo's each year.

The scale and pace of urbanization is creating unprecedented social, political, cultural and environmental challenges that must be addressed by the global community. Recognizing the plight of the one billion urban dwellers all over the world, at the 2000 Millennium Summit Heads of State and Government committed themselves to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers; agreed to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2020. Acknowledging how modest the slum target is, in 2005 world leaders gathered in New York revised the target to include prevention in the growth of new slums by paying proper attention to urban planning, land reform, and investments into affordable housing for the urban poor and low income earners.

As the region has been engulfed in political turmoil that has exacerbated the refugee crisis and worsened conditions in the cities, some Western Asia countries lag behind on slum prevention and have made limited progress on many Millennium Development Goal indicators. However, past experience has shown us that these trends can be reversed. The region has the tools and resources to improve the lives of millions. What it takes is a redoubling of efforts.

Acting is vital because slum populations bear an enormous potential for the achievement of all MDGs. The sheer concentration of people living in slums make them ideal targets for interventions aimed at reducing poverty, reducing child mortality and HIV/AIDS, improving literacy and promoting environmental sustainability. Concentration of populations in urban areas

greatly reduces the unit cost of piped water, sewers, drains and roads. The use of environmentally friendly energy sources and transport can reduce these costs even further.

There are encouraging examples where the introduction of sustainable urbanization policies has contributed to reversing the impact of environmental degradation and pollution and where sound and sustainable land regulation, and air and water management policies have resulted in reduction of soil erosion, improvement in air, water and sanitation quality and protection of biodiversity. Today's meeting provides a great opportunity to share these successful experiences and consider if they can be replicated.

For some countries of the region, promoting sustainable urbanization means upgrading slums and preventing the emergence of new ones. For others it means reducing the ecological footprint of their growing cities. They are at the avant-garde of "green architecture". Indeed, some countries in the region are the home of some of the world's most ambitious green projects. They bring together the best minds in green architecture and sustainable urban design.

Buildings account for a substantial amount of electricity, and water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, raw material use and water output. Green architecture bears an enormous potential in putting the world on a more sustainable consumption and production path. At a time where it is widely recognized that there is an urgent need to reduce the world's carbon footprint in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change, your leadership role in the area of green architecture can hardly be overstated.

These projects could have a truly groundbreaking impact if developing countries were to emulate new techniques that have just been developed and tried in new urban development through "smart" growth. This would enable them to improve on successful practices and thereby leap-frog to the urban development of the future. I hope we can address the important question of how to support such leap-frogging by developing countries during our panel on green architecture, among other issues. In my view, the sharing of technologies and know how is an important element to this end, as is the mobilization of resources, both public and private, including through the Islamic banking and finance system.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Both improving the lot of poor slum dwellers, and advancing green architecture will be essential in achieving MDG7, as well as all other interlinked goals and targets of the United Nations development agenda. As your region is playing an important role in addressing both of these challenges, I am looking forward to what promise to be a very interesting discussion and am confident that this meeting will enrich and help advance our deliberations in July in New York.

Thank you very much.

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