



**PRESENTATION TO THE
“ECOSOC ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW
REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING ON
SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION”**

**OF THE
UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR WEST ASIA
(UNEP/ROWA)**

By

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**Ritz Carlton Hotel
Manama, Bahrain
1-2 June 2008**

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner, and my colleagues at the United Nations Environment Programme, it is my great pleasure to be here today at this forum, the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review Regional Preparatory Meeting on Sustainable Urbanization. I would like to thank ECOSOC for extending an invitation to the United Nations Environment Programme to participate in the Meeting.

Sustainable Urbanisation is a key element of sustainable development. Urban areas are expanding all over the world, by as much as 20,000 square kilometres per annum, as highlighted in UNEP's GEO-4 report published last year. 50% of the global population, or 3 billion people, now live in cities and this is set to rise by a further 2 billion in the next 25 years as reported by UN-Habitat. Within the West Asia region there may be an increase in urban areas by 75% by 2030 according to the GEO-3 fact sheet for the region.

Our cities are part of a highly complex system and cannot be viewed in isolation from their surroundings. They play an increasingly important role in environmental issues at the local, national and global levels, for example, 80 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions originate from cities. Thus, cities need to be acknowledged as major partners in the fight against climate change. They need to become managers and users of the ecosystem on which they depend for their survival.

Urbanization is one of the main drivers of environmental change. The growth of city-regions and "metropolitanization" leads to significant impacts of cities on their surroundings. Yet, through rising to the challenge of sustainable development, cities also have the potential to

become efficient users and managers of the environment. Local and global aspects of environmental management are intrinsically linked, such that, for example, measures to improve air quality and provide clean water not only significantly enhance the health of urban residents, but have more far-reaching effects. Environmentally sensitive policies at the city level help preserve the ecosystems that cities depend on, and have an impact on the global environment.

Urban poverty and inequality is another important issue, and is fast becoming a feature of urban life. Poverty is a cause of environmental degradation and, at the same time, the urban poor are especially vulnerable to a degraded environment. However, cities provide positive benefits for human development and the environment through employment opportunities, economies of scale and many other factors. It is time to recognize that urban growth gives us the opportunity to create solutions to the environmental impact of cities, to achieve sustainable urbanisation.

UNEP, through its Urban Environment Unit at our headquarters in Nairobi, promotes a change in the urban development paradigm towards one which views the environment as an asset for cities. The services and benefits that the environment provides to cities are manifold. Cities can attract economic investment by promoting themselves as healthy, liveable cities. They can decrease service costs and input prices of urban services by better managing natural resources. They can reduce health costs. Intact ecosystems, such as wetlands, create buffer zones against flooding and other natural disasters. The environment provides market opportunities that can create jobs and generate revenue through tourism. Finally, the environment offers important recreational, educational and spiritual services. UNEP gives guidance to cities on

how they can use the environment to their advantage. The initiative includes tools on how to integrate the environment into city planning and guidance to individual projects on how to improve the environmental dimension. UNEP also promotes a participatory planning approach which involves all citizens and mainstreams the environment in strategies and decision-making.

The Urban Environment Unit works in close cooperation with the Regional Offices, including the Regional Office for West Asia based here in Bahrain, to undertake this work through a number of programmes, including the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, the Cities Alliance working to reduce urban poverty, the Sustainable Cities Programme, in partnership with UN-Habitat addressing urban planning and management, GEO-Cities, Sustainable Building and Construction and Eco-Housing. It is the first of these that I would like to take the opportunity to showcase during my short presentation, the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, or PCFV.

The Partnership has at its core the promotion of better urban air quality in developing countries through cleaner fuels and vehicles. Emissions from vehicles have major impacts on human health, the local, regional and global environment and the economy, and a reduction in these emissions is an essential part of trying to reduce urban air pollution and improve urban air quality.

Over 100 organisations from the private sector (both the oil industry and vehicles industry), governments, NGOs and international organisations are working together to promote and implement activities through the PCFV. The focus is on the phase-out of leaded gasoline worldwide, the reduction of sulphur in fuels and the introduction of clean vehicles

technologies and clean vehicles through the provision of technical assistance, capacity building and the development and dissemination of awareness raising materials.

The Partnership has seen, through its work, excellent progress, especially in the areas of the phase out of leaded gasoline and the reduction of sulphur levels in fuels.

Increasingly attention is being given by UNEP and its partners to the issue of growing vehicle fleets in developing and transition countries and the impacts on the environment of this expansion. As a result, more and more countries are asking for support from the PCFV, asking the Partnership to address additional clean fuels and vehicles issues, including more focus on the relationship between clean fuels and vehicles and climate change mitigation through, for example, supporting the introduction of low sulphur fuels, which has significant benefits for both local air pollution and climate change, and the benefits of efficient public transport systems.

UNEP/ROWA is working together with PCFV in the implementation of programme activities in the region, co-organising with the Partnership the Gulf Cooperation Council Policy Meeting on Clean Fuels and Vehicles in March of this year. The meeting involved a wide range of concerned government ministries, including environment, health, education as well as energy and transportation. It also involved representatives of the petroleum and transport industry, academia and NGOs. The meeting supported the League of Arab States commitment to phase-out lead in the gasoline in the region by the end of 2008 (a target already met by the GCC countries) and its endorsement for low sulphur fuels, requesting that a resolution be tabled with respect to a

region maximum sulphur level by a specified date. It also called on the Gulf Standards Organisation to adopt a GCC standard for sulphur levels, alongside other vehicular emission standards as well as developing legislation concerning inspection and maintenance of vehicles to ensure that the standards are met. UNEP will be following up with the GCC in the implementation of these recommendations through the provision of technical and policy guidance as requested.

Activities under the Partnership are also taking place at the national level, an example of which is Yemen, where the National Commitment Building Workshop to Phase-out Leaded Gasoline in Yemen, took place in Sana'a on 14-15 March 2007. Some 80 participants from the Ministries of Environment, Oil, Planning, the Social Fund for Development, vehicle companies, the health sector, the city of Sana'a, local NGOs and various embassies took part in the workshop, which focussed on the need to phase-out leaded gasoline due to the detrimental effects of lead on the well-being of the population (especially children) and the environment. Consensus on the phase-out of unleaded gasoline was universal and His Excellency Mr. Abdul Rahman Al-Eryani, Minister of Water and Environment, confirmed Yemen's commitment to abide by the Regional Ministerial Resolution to phase-out leaded gasoline in the Arab States by end of 2008. In an innovative approach, the local hospital carried out blood tests to ascertain lead levels in willing participants at the conference venue, thus making the issue of leaded gasoline much more personal and real. Once more, UNEP is continuing to work closely with the relevant ministries and agencies in Yemen in the pursuit of this commitment.

The Partnership is also supporting Jordan and Syria in developing pilot projects on clean fuels and vehicles.

As highlighted at the start of my presentation, the Urban Environment Unit at UNEP undertakes a number of different activities focussing on the challenge of sustainable urban development and the promotion of the environment as a key asset for cities. We, at the Regional Office, are supporting the regional component of these activities. As such, we stand ready to provide technical and policy guidance on the environmental aspects of sustainable urbanisation and I hope that through our work here during the course of this meeting that we might be able to start on a road to developing partnerships within the region in this important aspect of sustainable development.

I would like to thank ECOSOC once more for inviting UNEP to participate in this meeting and look forward to its positive outcomes and recommendations.

Thank you