

SPEECH

OF

HIS EXCELLENCY

SHAIKH MOHAMMED BIN MUBARAK AL-KHALIFA

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

BEFORE

THE REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING

FOR WEST ASIA

ON SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION

MANAMA, KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

1-2 JUNE, 2008

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all, and to participate with you in the inauguration of the proceedings of the Regional Preparatory Meeting of ESCWA, which precedes the United Nations ECOSOC Ministerial Review Meeting to be held in New York on 30 June.

I would also like to express how pleased we are in the Kingdom of Bahrain to be hosting this international gathering, wishing you a pleasant stay and a good opportunity to acquaint yourselves with Bahrain's achievements in all fields, and in particular in sustainable urbanization.

I believe that choosing sustainable urbanization as a theme to be discussed and studied will add great importance to the vital role undertaken by the Economic and Social Council, and will also support the efforts member states are making in all development-related fields, and particularly in implementing international commitments and targets regarding sustainable urbanization.

I would like here to underline our sincere appreciation to H.E Mr. Leo Merores, Chairman of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the UN HABITAT programme, and to the ESCWA, for their valuable contributions in preparing for this important meeting. We are hopeful that this meeting will serve to provide a forum for governments and civil society organizations, to enable us to evaluate progress in implementing the UN Millennium Development Goals, and that it will make a positive contribution to the forthcoming New York meeting.

Distinguished guests,

The world is today facing major challenges in the economic, social and environmental fields. Moreover, it is facing a new challenge in the food crisis recently addressed by the Council. These come in addition to the increasing global population: studies has shown in this regard that world population will increase from 6.7 billion people in 2007 to 9.2 billion people by 2050.

People are choosing to live in cities more than ever before, compounding the challenges of sustainable development in general, and sustainable urbanization in particular, in both the developed and developing worlds. This challenge forces us to address the importance of implementing sound policies, strategies and practices to combat rural poverty. These efforts will have to be made

within the framework of accomplishing specific objectives of improving public health so as to avoid the negative consequences of urbanization, and to secure a just distribution of the benefits of sustainable development, so that it reaches all citizens.

Distinguished Guests,

Cities can have a vital role in quickening the pace of economic and social growth if appropriate plans are in place to resolve housing problems and the increasing challenges and consequences of urban growth encountered by the authorities responsible for planning both present and future housing and basic utilities.

Addressing such challenges requires the participation of all stakeholders in planning for the future, and urging the international community to support the efforts of both the developed and developing worlds in this respect.

Distinguished Guests,

In essence, urban growth presents environmental, social, economic and political dimensions. Meanwhile, it represents a framework for addressing housing problems and a comprehensive and interlinked blueprint for development in cities and villages. This makes clear to us that urban growth and the eradication of poverty would, in

effect, address housing problems resulting from poverty, environmental deterioration and lack of security. Such tasks require us to draw up integrated housing policies to deal with all deficits and deficiencies.

Distinguished Guests,

West Asia and the Gulf region are today witnessing significant progress in urbanization and development, which is undoubtedly contributing to reducing housing problems in our region and in offering housing to a great number of our citizens, a fact that is supporting the efforts of those countries such as the Kingdom of Bahrain in issues related to urban development.

In this regard, I would like to commend the presentation of the United Nations Special Citation of the Habitat Scroll of Honour Award for urban development and housing to His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain. This award represents a great event of which we are extremely proud, particularly given that this award comes as support for Bahrain's continuous efforts in the field of sustainable urbanization, pioneered by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, through his efforts to lay the develop the economy and to modernize infrastructure, and to launch reform programmes and social and sustainable development.

Such accomplishments will provide a forceful impetus to create a stable, capable society that ensures full economic and social protection and welfare to all its citizens within a framework of integrated development policies. These policies are fully inspired by a strong conviction of human development as the fundamental basis for the progress of all societies.

I am pleased to underline, in this regard, the advanced level continually achieved by Bahrain in the field of human development, as confirmed in United Nations reports.

Distinguished Guests,

As other areas in the world, our region suffers from scarcity of water resources, particularly in urban areas that do not rely on rivers. This demands from all of us that we explore the means to overcome this problem, to utilize modern technology in cooperation among states and international organizations to provide and transfer technology and advanced science to developing and least developed states, so as to make such technologies available to resolve problems of water scarcity.

We all realize that technology is not yet available to everyone, particularly environment-friendly innovations, information and communication technologies, and even modern treatments and medicines. We realize, too, that such innovations are the property of multinationals, which

would necessitate financing of sustainable development as a vital requirement for sustainable urban growth.

In this context, I want to praise the vital role banks are playing in this field , and particularly Islamic banks such as the Islamic Development Bank, which has assigned 10 billion US Dollars in fulfilment of the UN Millennium Development Goals to eradicate poverty by 2015.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we gather today, we look forward today to knowing more about the concepts and developments of sustainable urban growth as an important means to solving social, economic and environmental challenges of accelerated urban development. We are also looking forward to assessing the implementation of urban policies and strategies so as to avoid random or irregular urbanization, through appropriate land allocation, provision of services and infrastructure, decentralization, and the adoption of appropriate measures to integrate sustainable urbanization within development plans.

This meeting will provide us with an important forum to assess the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the international community, as embodied in the eradication of poverty, the promotion of education, the provision of the

essentials of public health, the empowerment of women, the creation of decent employment opportunities, proper housing and protection of the environment.

I am confident that the conclusions of our discussions will contribute valuably to the agenda of the Economic and Social Council in the Annual Ministerial Review, to begin on 30 June in New York. We hope that such meetings will serve to enhance dialogue and the exchange of regional and international experiences on means and mechanisms to implementing the Millennium Development Goals, and create better understanding of sustainable urbanization choices and directions.

In conclusion, I wish you a successful and fruitful meeting for the benefit of all humanity.

Thank you.