

UN HABITAT **FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE**

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Address

By

Dr. Joan Clos,

Under-Secretary-General and

Executive Director of UN-HABITAT

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

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Your Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries,
Your Excellencies the Heads of States,
Your excellencies the Prime Ministers and Ministers,
Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Secretary-General of the Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries here in this beautiful city of Istanbul. I would like to take this opportunity to thank H.E. **Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs** of the Republic of Turkey, and the people of Turkey for their warm hospitality.

As detailed in UN-HABITAT's report to the Conference, **we are actively contributing to the implementation of the Programme of Action for LDCs** by monitoring urbanization trends, developing strategic approaches, building partnerships and concretely supporting national governments, mayors and other urban stakeholders to meet the urban challenges.

Excellencies, ladies and Gentlemen, let me highlight some important points:

Urbanization trends in the LDCs

In LDCs, the urban population is growing at an unprecedented rate of 4.7 percent per year, meaning that it will double in less than 15 years. Due to the lack of adequate urban planning and management capacities at national and local levels, this growth is resulting in the expansion of slums and informal settlements and income inequalities rather than contributing to increasing the wealth of cities. In comparative regional terms, Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed the highest development of slums with 62% of urban residents living in slum conditions. Slums, as you are well aware, are the physical manifestation of urban poverty characterized by multiple deprivations of water, sanitation, crowded housing, and a wide array of vulnerabilities.

Five important challenges to be met by national governments, mayors and other urban stakeholders

(i) **Anticipate and plan in advance to prevent further slum-forming urban growth with the aim to develop livable and productive cities and neighborhoods.** Our new direction and agenda is to better anticipate the scale of this urban growth and to guide it - through better urban planning, restructuring and densification - in order to improve living conditions, prevent slum development and limit urban sprawl. A benefit of the new planning agenda, at national and regional levels, is that it supports the development of a **balanced network of better performing small and medium cities to service rural areas** and decrease the pressure on capital cities and other megacities.

(ii) **Support urban employment creation.** Firstly, by improving the physical environment, in particular to ensure mobility, and to maximize the benefits of economies of scale - again through better planning. Secondly, by developing a supportive regulatory framework to support individual and

private stakeholders' initiatives and ensure equitable development. This will include better land management systems that acknowledge security of tenure for all, including for small individual investments in family homes and small businesses.

(iii) Create a better institutional environment to involve all actors. This entails improving the rule of law and setting up appropriate urban legal frameworks. Too many cities have outdated legal frameworks, often based on colonial models.

(iv) Another important challenge to be addressed is the mitigation of natural risks at the city level, many of which are being exacerbated by climate change. The impacts of disasters are far greater in poorly planned and inequitable cities. Here I would like to pay a particular tribute to the state, the mayors and the people of Haiti for their courage and determination, after the 12 January 2010 earthquake, to engage in a strong urban planning initiative at neighbourhood, municipal and metropolitan levels and to undertake necessary policy reforms to address the roots of the vulnerability of Haitian communities. I take this opportunity to congratulate H.E. Michel Martelly, the newly elected President of Haiti, and his people. I assure them of our continued support to demonstrate that it is possible to transform Haiti's vulnerable cities into safe, equitable and well functioning cities as well as promote alternative development poles among its secondary cities.

(iv) The last important challenge I would like to mention is the necessity to promote energy efficient cities, mitigate the negative impacts of urbanization on greenhouse-gas emissions and adapt cities to climate change. Urban areas in LDCs, with their high concentration of population, economic activity and infrastructure, are likely to face the most severe impacts of climate change. However, urbanization will also offer many opportunities to develop cohesive adaptation strategies to deal with climate change. The populations, enterprises and local authorities should be among the principal players in developing these strategies.

New Urban Planning

Planning is an important concept for urban development and management that allows us to address all of the above challenges. New urban planning requires us to be selective in our actions to make city vision into a reality, as we don't have the resources and the capacity to plan everything at the same time. The new vision of urban planning which UN-HABITAT is promoting is not comprehensive planning. It is strategic and involves planning in phases. For the first phase, I would strongly advocate to start planning public spaces that provide most urban services, specifically the street, and guarantee future mobility, as an essential condition for economic development. The street is, in fact, the beginning of urban culture. The example of how Manhattan's streets were drawn 200 years ago is instructive, because Manhattan is now one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in the world.

This new urban planning also needs to be articulated at different levels:

- (i) existing neighborhoods, either formal or informal, where communities should play an important role,
- (ii) municipalities, a crucial level for cross-sectoral approach and for making things happen in reality through the involvement of decision-makers, and

- (iii) **metropolitan areas and regions, to bring the long term perspective, the link with regional development and involve national partners.**

This new urban planning finally requires being **participatory, as it is not only about plans but, more importantly, about institutional development, resource mobilization, investment and decisive actions to make it effective and transformative.** The involvement of all urban actors, including the populations themselves, is necessary to ensure their full ownership in urban changes as no one, including central or local governments, can transform our cities by themselves.

All of this requires a change of mentality, enabling us to go back to the basics that work. I can report to you **how impressive the results of such a planning approach are for transforming cities.** It was the case in my city of **Barcelona** but, everyday, I am also witnessing how it is boosting positive changes in poor neighborhoods in **Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Haiti** and many other countries.

Planning is an essential component of the **"International Guidelines on Access to Basic Services for All"** that complement the **"International Guidelines on Decentralization and Strengthening of Local Authorities,"** respectively approved by Member States in 2007 and 2009. We are now integrating this guidance within all UN-Habitat's programmes as well as supporting interested Member States to adapt them to their national contexts.

Among other partners who are joining us to support this initiative, let me welcome the initiative of the **Lao PDR** which is organizing a regional event next June focusing on urban governance and basic services. Let me also highlight **our expanded partnership with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of states, a result of the Programme of Action for the LDCs** adopted at the third UN LDCs Conference held in Brussels in 2001. Recognizing the urgent need to address the urbanization challenges in the 79 ACP countries, of which 40 are LDCs, UN-HABITAT co-organized together with the European Commission and the ACP Secretariat in 2009 a Ministerial Conference on urbanization challenges and poverty reduction in the ACP countries. We are also currently implementing the second phase of the **Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme** in more than 30 ACP LDCs. The programme is funded by the European Commission, in cooperation with the ACP Group of state. It is producing tangible results in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goal related to the improvement of the life of slum dwellers.

I would like to finish my presentation by calling upon your support at the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, for the **adoption of a resolution to convene a third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development (Habitat III) in 2016,** twenty years after the Habitat II Conference that took place here, in Istanbul. The Habitat III Conference will include the review of past policies, achievements and obstacles and will put in place **a new urban development agenda, capable of responding to these urban challenges and opportunities of the future.** In order to prepare for this important event, we are already encouraging each Member State to formally establish a **National Urban Forum** as an advocacy platform for policy dialogue among all partners with the view toward promoting better urban development.

I thank you for your attention.