



*Check against delivery*

**OPENING STATEMENT BY H. E. AMBASSADOR LÉO MÉRORÈS,  
PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

**ECOSOC ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING ON  
SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION**

**Manama, Bahrain,  
1 June 2008**

Your Highness,  
Honourable Foreign Minister,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate the Kingdom of Bahrain for organizing this Regional Preparatory Meeting for ECOSOC's Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) on the important topic of sustainable urbanization. I am honored by your invitation to contribute to this meeting, which marks an important step in the preparations of the Annual Ministerial Review. Before I share my views on how the meeting will contribute to the 2008 Review, please allow me to provide a brief background on the Annual Ministerial Review.

At the turn of the Millennium, by adopting the Millennium Declaration, world leaders committed themselves to an ambitious, yet achievable development agenda. The Millennium Declaration marked a distillation of key elements of the outcomes of the UN conferences and summits of the 1990s, including a number of time-bound targets. When world leaders came together again during the 2005 World Summit to assess progress, it became apparent that the world was off track to meet the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, by the 2015 target date.

To close this implementation gap, world leaders mandated ECOSOC to hold an Annual Ministerial Review (AMR). The Reviews aim to accelerate implementation by:

- strengthening accountability on commitments to achieve agreed goals;
- providing a forum for Review and Renewal of commitments; and
- sustaining the momentum to achieve the development goals, including the MDGs.

The Review allows the Council to identify the main obstacles hampering the implementation of the United Nations Development Agenda and the measures to overcome them. To ensure productive deliberations, the Council selects a specific area of the UNDA. At this year's review, Ministers will focus on "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development".

While there are global challenges such as climate change, regions vary greatly in terms of the key challenges which they face in the area of sustainable development. Holding this dialogue will help crystallize the specific challenges faced by your region. In the future we hope that all other regions will follow your leadership and hold regional meetings.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This discussion on sustainable urbanization is very timely. Urbanization is a defining feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, the world population will reach a landmark in 2008: for the first time in history the urban population will equal the rural population of the world and, from then on, the world population will be urban in its majority.

The good news is that urbanization can be a positive force for human development. Cities are powerful engines for economic and social development. In developed and developing countries they generate a disproportionate share of income and provide extensive opportunities for employment and investment. At the same time, they are also home to 1 billion slum dwellers living in often dehumanizing conditions, and, if present trends continue, their numbers is likely to increase to two billion by 2030.

Our progress in improving the lives of slum dwellers and provide people with access to safe drinking water and sanitation, as stipulated in target MDG7, will therefore hinge upon our success in promoting sustainable urbanization. But not only the achievement of the MDG7 will depend on putting urbanization on a more sustainable footing. Also our efforts on many other Millennium Development Goals, such as reducing child mortality, improving access and quality of education and enhancing access to maternal health services will depend on how well we will be able to handle rapid urbanization.

Today, the region's record in promoting sustainable urbanization is mixed. As a whole, some Western Asian countries are struggling on slum prevention and have made limited progress on the MDG indicators. This can mainly be traced back on high population growth and political turmoil in the region, which has exacerbated the refugee crisis and worsened situations in the cities. At the same time, several countries are at the very forefront of green architecture with a series of spectacular projects that will reduce their carbon footprint and improve the quality of life for their citizens.

With its diverse experience in slum upgrading and slum prevention, as well as green architecture, the region's experiences are equally valuable for developing and developed countries. During the next two days we will have an opportunity to explore the lessons learned, as well as next steps which need to be taken to overcome remaining obstacles. I am confident that the messages that will emerge from this meeting will not only help advance sustainable urbanization within the region but will also make an invaluable contribution to the debate among Ministers at the 2008 Review in July.

I am looking forward to our discussion.

Thank you for your kind attention.