

# UN HABITAT

## United Nations Human Settlements Programme

**Statement by Ms. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira**

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**And**

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**at the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of  
Women**

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*Ms. Chairperson, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates and colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen*

UN-HABITAT is grateful to the Commission for its focus on empowerment of rural women this year. As the lead UN Agency for housing and urban development, and the focal point for monitoring progress in the attainment of the Habitat Agenda, we believe that these discussions should bridge the rural urban divide and provide an important platform for contributing to more equitable, socially sustainable and economically just urban development for women and girls, not to mention peace and security.

*Ms. Chairperson,*

It is now recognized that there exists an economic, social and environmental interdependence between urban and rural areas. As such, the concept that rural development is completely distinct from urban development is no longer valid. What is required is a balanced and mutually supportive approach to development in both areas simultaneously, sometimes referred to as a rural-urban linkage development approach. The flow of people and resources between rural and urban areas needs better and more regionally focused ways of understanding how women and men get their own needs met and create opportunities for improving their lives.

The movement of people between urban and rural areas reveal a significant diversity in situations, yet the dynamics of the rural-urban interface have yet to be fully recognized by policymakers and development agencies, which often refer to rural and urban experiences as distinct from each other, when rather they are mutually reinforcing. Providing healthy and safe living environments, productive economies and equitable social benefits are challenges facing both urban and rural areas globally.

Today, just over half the world's people live in urban areas, and we expect the percentage of urban dwellers to rise to 70 per cent by 2050. Developing countries account for 95 per cent of current urban growth. The number of urban dwellers is expected to triple in Africa and double in Asia. An important dimension of urban life is the condition of women and girls in towns and cities; it is a condition marked by historical exclusion and multiple deprivations.

One in three people in cities of the developing world live in a slum. Although conditions vary, research shows that women and girls often suffer the worst effects of slum life, such as poor access to clean water, inadequate sanitation, unemployment, insecurity of tenure and gender-based violence (exacerbated at home by stressful and over-crowded living conditions, and in public areas by poor security and eviction threats).

*Ms. Chairperson,*

UN-Habitat works directly with women's networks and other UN agencies to enhance their awareness of the realities of urbanization, slum growth and the need for interventions specifically targeting women and girls in deprived urban neighbourhoods. So far, the vast majority of women's advocates have focused on the plight of rural women and indeed, there has been a long-



standing notion that the poor are better off in urban than rural areas, but recent studies and research are showing the contrary.

On the whole, governments and policy makers are still responding inadequately to different gender needs in towns and cities. With time, this deepens the disadvantages for women and girls. It denies them an equal voice to bring about improvements in their communities, and holds back the full potential for social and economic development in their cities and towns.

With global threats such as climate change and global recession, never has there been a greater urgency to develop innovative interventions. Still, there is also substantial progress on improving gender equality in cities and local governance. This goes to show that strategic and targeted programmes and activities can, indeed, advance both gender equality and sustainable urbanization in mutually reinforcing ways. In this respect, UN-Habitat stands at the forefront of initiatives to sustain past gains and future momentum—with strong support and political will from governments and fruitful cooperation with other United Nations agencies (such as UN Women and UNICEF), civil society, central and local governments and the private sector.

*Honourable Ministers, Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,*

We ask the Commission on the Status of Women, all governments, women's organizations, regional and international organizations present, to ensure:

1. women's full participation in the planning, management and governance of cities and towns;
2. improving policies and programmes targeting victims of disasters taking into account how gender affects women and men differently in crisis;
3. mainstreaming of gender issues in the design and implementation of urban water and sanitation programmes so as to bring wide health, social and economic benefits to women and their communities;
4. effective government reform around land and property to provide pro-poor, gender-responsive policies and programmes that ensure that women's rights to land and property are not undermined by social norms and traditional practices that discriminate against women;
5. continued support to local authorities that are working with community groups, including women's networks, to improve safety and security through greater gender-sensitivity in urban planning and design.

Thank you for your kind attention.

