Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen
[Salutations to be inserted based on attendee]

It is honour for me to have been invited by the organisers to deliver this statement at this high level meeting.

I would also like to thank my fellow participants for their presence here, keeping the momentum since the adoption of the New Urban Agenda during the landmark Habitat III conference which took place in October last year in Quito.

We would like to commend all those who worked hard to participate and remained engaged during the whole process including the preparatory regional meetings, thematic debates and negotiations making the conference a success.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am addressing you here in my capacity as the Mayor of the City of Victoria, the capital city of Seychelles. We, the mayors, we consider ourselves as the public authority closest to the citizen. As local authorities we are at the forefront in addressing the human dimension of the dramas and hopes of our youth, exposed daily as we are to their complaints of being jobless or being considered as troublemakers because they are pushing for their voice to be heard on issues such as corruption, good governance, of their lack of perspectives in countries, where their creativity and initiatives are undermined.

And this situation can worsen if not properly addressed in a period when the level of youth entering in the labour market yearly in Africa will rise from 200 million youth to 2 or 3 times more within the next 20/30 years ahead.

No surprising that part of our young people think the only option left is for them to try and earn a living outside the continent. And we know that many of them will not reach the dreamed land, because of huge difficulties they will be facing along the way, not to mention loss of lives when trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.
And it is in these sad circumstances that local authorities single out. When for most officials from national government or international agencies these young people that passed away in their attempts to cross the Mediterranean Sea are statistics for official reports or TV and Radio headlines, for us, mayors and local authorities, these young people who passed away are dead bodies to be repatriated, burying funerals to organize, concrete parents, relatives and friends to assist and comfort. This is also, what I meant when I mentioned the human sensitivity that local authorities develop when tackling the youth problem in Africa.

We are all aware of the fact that our national governments and the international community as a whole agreed to the universal nature of the sustainable development goals and defined a series of global agendas aiming at their realization, including the 2030 agenda, the climate change agenda, the finance for development agenda, and the new urban agenda. Those agendas are supposed to kick start a transformative process leading to a better world for all, including the youth. There is also a shared understanding that these agendas will not have real impact on the ground, unless they are implemented first and foremost at the local level, in cities and territories. This is the place where opportunities are offered to the youth, where their living conditions are improved or worsened, where the youth are reconciled with, or divorced from the development and democracy narrative.

Given the pivotal potential of cities and territories in addressing the youth challenge on the continent, it is surprising that the role of these cities and territories is not really considered when defining policies and strategies for effective and sustainable solutions to the youth challenge.

We all know that from around 2030 onwards, most of Africans will be living in cities, not only in major cities but also in medium-size and small cities. Half of the population in these cities is 17 years old and younger. The labour force in these cities is expected to rise from 400 million in the year 2000 to 1.2 billion in 2040, which is a threefold increase in one generation. To have a correct picture of the challenge ahead, these figures mean that African cities will have to accommodate in the labour market, the equivalent of 3 times the current population of the United States or the European Union. One of the main characteristics of African cities is that the share of stable jobs in the labour force is rather low, barely exceeding 30 per cent in most cities, except in South Africa and in the North Africa countries.
On average 60 per cent of the labour force is represented by vulnerable employment most of which is in what is called the informal economy. African cities are therefore compelled to focus more attention on local economic development if they are to provide appropriate solutions to the youth challenge. Mayors and local authorities should do their utmost best in order to keep and attract economic activities, improve city and business competitiveness, and promote job creation. This is what pushed our continental organization, the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa, UCLG-Africa, to develop a Local Economic Network of Africa (LEDNA), which is an Internet based platform aiming at gathering and sharing knowledge on local economic development.

**Excellencies**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Urbanization can be a source for spurring development and generating prosperity as it cuts across many of the other sustainable development goals such as ending poverty, economic growth, promoting health and wellbeing, climate change and preventing environmental degradation just to name a few.

We owe it to our people especially to our youth to ensure its success.

Our youth is our most valuable resource in achieving this. It is important that we put them at the core of the sustainable development of our cities and towns.

We are unfortunately not keeping with the speed of urbanization and we as governments, civil society organizations and the private sectors need to come together and put in place strategic policies to ensure that our cities and towns are sustainable and poverty free.

The youth has an important leadership role to play in the future of our cities and towns. However, we have to create more platforms for our youth to express their views and aspirations.

Too often they are not included in the policy decisions, and this is a weakness as their issues are our issues of today. Therefore they must be allowed to be the driving force behind the economic and sustainable development of their respective cities.
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

Seychelles has been empowering its youth through the creation of the youth Assembly since 2012.

The platform allows young representatives to bring forward concerns that are affecting them, related to the different challenges they face, regarding education, health and social matters. They are engaged in providing the solutions for these problems themselves.

They have had tremendous impact on national policies and fulfilling a monitoring role to ensure good governance and accountability in the country.

They have the ability and zeal to push for the eradication of injustices, the protection of human rights and be transformational agents for the future they need.

A healthy and youthful workforce has outstanding potential for economic transformation in cities. A key aspect of maximizing our human capital investment is to promote good and healthy living. To improve the productivity of the working force, we must first ensure that we have a healthy population.

We have to strengthen the institutions concerned and support their efforts to reduce child mortality, prevention of infectious diseases, scheduled and nationwide immunization, recovery programmes for drug and alcohol victims and importantly providing access to good and nutritious food by all.

Article 29 of the Seychelles constitution guarantees Seychellois access to free health care services without discrimination. Infrastructure and community based health care programmes are key to the implementation of our national health care strategic plan, with the aim of enhancing quality health services.

The government has invested greatly in youth oriented programs regarding reproductive health care, sensitization and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV AIDS, to help its young people lead healthy lives. This we recognize is an important element of harnessing the demographic dividend of our country.
Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

There is no better time than now to increase investment in our youth. A large number of our youth are not in schools, and unable to acquire the skills they need to contribute to the development of their country’s economy.

We, as representatives of our government must strive to bridge this gap by putting into place effective educational policies in partnership with the private sector. Providing access to education alone is not sufficient, we must strive to provide quality education.

In Seychelles we are striving to find long term solution to the multiple educational challenges we face which mainly has been the lack of teachers, low performance of majority of state school students, and lack of learning materials.

We are also in the process of developing the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) based on the 2012 Shanghai Consensus and the UNESCO TVET Strategic Plan 2016-2021, aiming at equipping all youth and adults with the skills required for employment, decent work, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning.

To ensure poverty-free cities, then access to education alone is not sufficient; we have to make urgent investment ensuring the participation of the private sector in the employment of young people. Public private partnership is central in creating an enabling environment that facilitate job creation and access to employment.

Particular focus was given to single parents and predominantly to young mothers through the flexible employment programme, which placed them in employment under flexible hours meeting, which meets the requirement of both parties.
We have also introduced the annual Job Recruitment fairs, which last year saw the participation of 252 employers from different sectors. Moreover, 572 people gained employment through this programme. However, despite initiatives such as the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme and the Small Enterprise Promotion Agency (SEnPA) which has been promoting the empowering people with entrepreneurial skills, we still lack an economic environment for young entrepreneurs who wish to venture in their own enterprise, which consequently may also lead to job creations for other youth.

They continue to face the challenges of access to finance, infrastructural deficits, access to resources remains a barrier to doing business. The ease of doing business remains an obstacle and is one that requires urgent solutions.

Yes, we also must have synergy between investment and policies in order to facilitate entrepreneurship, especially by removing barriers that inhibit businesses and economic growth. These elements are necessary to propel Africa towards the African we want.

Given our size, most of the main services and jobs are accessible to the population, thus we are not faced with the problem of migration to urban areas as most other countries. Nonetheless however, we still have a relatively high demand for houses and land. However, the Government is committed to put in place a holistic, sustainable and transparent framework for housing and land developments.

This is evident in the new approach currently being undertaken by the government through its comprehensive housing plan. We are addressing demands of our people for housing and other relevant infrastructure and services in a sustainable way.

Victoria is undergoing a phase of transformation whereby there is a lot of development taking place, which are in line with the Victoria master plan and which aims to breathe life into our main city and bring people into it.

The issue of climate change however continues to be an obstacle for the development of your cities and this is why the Seychelles delegates in Quito welcomed and endorsed climate change commitments in the new urban agenda, as this is an issue which continues to affect our low lying urban and coast areas and people.
We acknowledge that our main challenge lies in available resources to upgrade and provide new infrastructure to better serve our urban areas and our people, however the government is committed to improve our cities and people’s lives in and around those areas, whilst not compromising on our ways of life and unique features and heritage. This can only be achieved through good planning for sustainable development.

We trust that this event will offer a good opportunity for us to reflect on this daunting issue of youth and the city, and to reflect on how this issue can find sustainable solutions in the African context.

I thank you