

Statement by  
President of the Economic and Social Council  
United Nations

International Tunneling Association  
May 2005

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to participate in the conference of the International Tunneling Association in Istanbul, a city which developed one of the first subway systems in the world. This city also has a neighborhood called “tünel”, which means “tunnel”. Istanbul is also in the process of building a modern underwater tunnel. These developments make Istanbul an ideal city to hold a meeting of the International Tunneling Association (ITA) which provides intellectual leadership in defining the role of infrastructures such as tunnels and underground space in creating a sustainable, safe and healthy city. I take this opportunity to warmly congratulate ITA for organizing this event. I would also like to thank the President of ITA, Mr. Harvey Parker, for having fostered very strong and cooperative ties with the United Nations over the course of nearly two decades.

Istanbul, we recall, hosted the United Nations National Conference on Human Settlements Habitat II, better known as the City Summit, in 1996. This summit noted that the underlying trends that is reshaping the world’s urban structures is ‘metropolization of the world economy’, a reference to the archipelagic spatial structure of emerging global urban networks. Megacities the world over, comprising of an urban core and associated hinterland, and inhabited by more than 10 Million people, are set to grow exponentially. In 2001 there were only 19 megacities. By 2015, it is estimated that there will be about 60 megacities, most of which will be in developing countries. Estimates predict that by 2030, 60% of the world’s 8.1 billion people, 4.9 billion will dwell in cities. These increases will place an enormous burden on land use and will lead to degradation of land

and forests, loss of biodiversity, and a decline in the quality of air. Against this backdrop, underground space will be used more and more for housing, offices, warehousing, garages and storage as well as for infrastructure in the coming years. These developments will promote environmentally sustainable urbanization by conserving energy, reducing air pollution and creating more open scenery above ground, and thereby allowing cities more land uses options.

Today, more than ever before, we have to put the urban agenda at the forefront of sustainable development as the impact of rapid urbanization will continue to manifest themselves in a vast array of problems, including increasing urban poverty, homelessness and inadequate housing; unemployment; disaffection among youth; ethnic tension; violence; drugs; poor urban infrastructure; social disintegration; land degradation; traffic congestion; air, water and noise pollution; health epidemics, to mention just a few. This will have direct impact on human well being. For example, water and poor sanitation in densely populated cities are responsible for 10 million preventable deaths worldwide every year.

These challenges can be addressed through public-private partnership in urban planning and development, and require the construction of large-scale capital infrastructure for transportation, sanitation, public safety, recreation and health. Tunneling will be a useful tool in the provision of energy, clean water, sewage and transportation systems. Thus, there will be a great need for underground systems to provide affordable and easily applicable technical solutions needed by cities, especially for the poorer groups in cities. The endorsement by Habitat II conference of “the universal goals of ensuring adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive”, should be seen in this context. Another dimension of sub-surface construction that provides the life blood of countries that deserve equal attention are pipelines that transport energy over long distances. We in Pakistan realize the full importance of tunneling this crucial sector and the economic benefits such projects bring to the people of the region. A number of pipeline projects seeking to transport oil and gas are under active consideration in our region including the

Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Oil and Gas Pipeline (TAP), Qatar-Pakistan Off-shore Gas Pipeline and Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project.

As you all know, the United Nations has been at the forefront of advocacy on two cardinal goals in the quest for a better world: to promote peace and security and foster progress in social and economic development. In recognition of its contribution to peace and prosperity, the organization won the 2001 Noble Peace Prize.

The Economic and Social Council, which I am privileged to preside over, is charged with the primary responsibility for promoting higher standards of living, full employment, economic and social progress, health, education and cultural cooperation, as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms. Through our role of promoting coordination and providing policy guidance to the United Nations funds and programmes as well as its functional and regional commissions, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights, we are in a unique position to support your contributions to developing more sustainable cities.

Our work brings together governments, civil society organizations and the business community in a robust and productive dialogue on all issues of development. This arrangement ensures that we can bring to bear on any issue a diverse array of perspectives and competencies and thereby make our humble contribution in the development process.

Allow me to share with you some possibilities for working together with the Economic and Social Council. We have been providing civil society organizations and business representatives, like the International Tunneling Association, a window of opportunity to interact with governments. Our long collaboration could borrow from this experience. We could build on the constructive involvement of the International Tunneling Association with the Economic Commission for Africa on tunneling issues to

promote a much broader solutions dialogue on tunneling and tunnel safety that bring together all the interested parties. The collaboration spirit resulted in resolution 2001/29 on the Europe-Africa permanent link through the Strait of Gibraltar. This resolution “welcomes the organization by the International Tunneling Association, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa, of the seminar held at Rabat in April 1999 on the modeling of the cost” of the tunnel link between Europe and Africa.

Another initiative that could come handy is the United Nations Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development. This initiative has the objective of identifying, highlighting and promoting replication of successful business policies and practices that are both profitable and promote social and economic advancement of poor people. The UN Alliance is part of a growing family of efforts within and outside the UN system that emphasizes the positive role business can play in development. It emphasizes promotion of business, stimulation of entrepreneurial capacity-building and encouragement of investments, commerce and related support in-country and internationally. It is therefore a model that can be replicated in areas such as tunnel development. This initiative can serve as a template for future collaboration among private companies, local authorities, governments and NGOs.

This year is yet another one when the United Nations will be in the limelight. In September the General Assembly will be undertaking a review at a Summit level of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the internationally agreed development goals that have been the organizing reference point of the work of the United Nations. These goals, that were incorporated in the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits of the past two decades, such as HABITAT II, that I referred to earlier, cover all areas of development, from social development, to the empowerment of women, population, the environment and human settlement and financing for development. Of immediate interest to our work here is goal 7 the urge for ensuring of environmental sustainability by integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources; the halving, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to

safe drinking water and basic sanitation; and achieving by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, and goal 8 the urge for the development of a global partnership for development.

This important review has already been put in motion through a series of expert level meetings that have been undertaken by the ECOSOC. In June and July, in furtherance of this work, the Council will devote its High-Level and Coordination Segments to the review of the Millennium Development Goals and the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits. This forum will provide an opportunity for governments, and all stakeholders to exchange views on how best to provide further impetus to the implementation of the development goals. In this sense, the forum provides further opportunity for pursuing the issues of rapid urbanization and of the strategies for coping with the challenges it poses. It is my view that the International Tunneling Association, and other entities that place high premium on sustainable urban development and solution in that regard has an important role in these unfolding events. This contribution will be particularly important because the outcome of the discussion will be transmitted to the Summit itself in September. It is at the Summit that we can all hope to enlist the commitment of world leaders to muster the political will to push the implementation of all the development goals and the goal on human settlements forward so that the goals can be met on schedule. Needless to add, the Millennium Development Goals from, Goal 1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2 to achieve universal primary education; 3 to promote gender equality and empower women; 4 to reduce child mortality; 5 to improve maternal health; 6 to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; 7 to ensure environmental sustainability; and 8 to develop a global partnership for development, are mutually exclusive and should be pursued in tandem.

The MDGs provide opportunities to the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society to contribute to the realization of the Organization's goals, the Declaration brought greater clarity to the shared and individual roles and responsibilities of key state and non-state actors. The global agenda also made representative participation in its implementation an imperative.

It is my hope that the International Tunneling Association will play an important part in attaining the Millennium Development Goals, in particular in regard to Millennium Goal Number 7 – in ensuring environmental sustainability. The overall accepted definition of sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” While the first part of this definition relates to conventional economic and social objectives of development, the second part incorporates a long-term view. The contribution of sub-terrain construction, in this sense, is not limited to enhance Goal Number 7, sustainable development. It also enhances food production, thereby improving income opportunities of the rural poor, Goals Number 1, improves sanitation and the quality of water, which has a positive effect on both infant mortality and maternal health care, Goal Number 4 and 5. The most important contribution the International Tunneling Association can make is to expand partnership with companies and governments in developing countries, thereby contributing to Goal Number 8: expanding global partnership.

In concluding, let me say that the responsibility of attaining the MDGs does not rest only on the shoulders of poor countries. Rich nations must also take ownership of the MDGs and support policies and programmes to attain them. I am happy to say that ITA has actively promoted sub-surface terrain usage and thus contributed to sustainable development and the environment over the last decade in collaboration with the United Nations. This is all the more important as tunneling has a key role in both rural and urban development. Let us build on this dialogue in the coming months and beyond and in the process contribute to creating a more sustainable environment. I look forward to a fruitful exchange of views at this event and to strengthened collaboration in the future.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to President Harvey Parker, and Dr. Yücel Erdem, Chairman, ITA-2005 for inviting the United Nations to this important meeting.

I thank you for your attention.