

17 October 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Opening plenary of Habitat III**

H.E. Mr. Rafael Correa Delgado, President of the Republic of Ecuador,
H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Ministers, Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to be here today in the beautiful city of Quito at this historic moment to participate in Habitat III and witness the adoption of the New Urban Agenda.

I thank the Government and people of Ecuador for your warm welcome, and to the residents of Quito, muchas gracias por su hospitalidad. The fact that Ecuador is organizing a conference of this scale only months after the terrible earthquake that hit your country, reflects the spirit of the human spirit and the commitment of Ecuador to move towards a resilient and sustainable future.

The many thousands of participants who have come to Quito for the Habitat III Conference are a testament to the importance of cities to our lives, of sustainable urban development to our world, and of the New Urban Agenda to guiding humanity to a sustainable urban future.

Mass urbanization is underway around the globe, and along with the effects of climate change, and the lack of peace in so many parts of the world, the movement of people is the great challenge of the 21st century.

The abstractions of modern cities are undeniable. Cities are our prime social and cultural hubs, and are the engines of production, innovation, trade and economic growth. The draw of opportunity has led to nearly 1.4 billion more people living in cities than two decades ago. By 2050 some 60 to 70 per cent of the world's population will reside in urban areas.

I believe it is fair to say that urban planning has not kept pace with mass urbanization. One billion people live in urban slums where they lack access to basic services like water, sanitation, and energy. This has brought about many negative effects. Seventy-five percent of our cities have higher levels of income inequality today than in 1996. And seventy percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, and global waste, originate from cities.

The vulnerability of our habitat set against the accelerating pace of climate change, and human population growth – estimated to hit 8.5 billion by 2030 – all point to an unsustainable future if we do not take positive action. That action is now being brought into place.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement, and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, all adopted in 2015, provide us with a masterplan to transform our world for the better. Through their implementation we will create a sustainable way of life for humanity on this planet.

The New Urban Agenda now joins the masterplan as the framework to guide us towards well-planned, well-designed, and well-managed cities.

The effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda will require the expertise and collaboration of all stakeholders – not least through the ideas and efforts of mayors and local communities. They are the cutting edge of implementation.

Next year, I will fulfil the mandate given by Member States and convene a two-day High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda, and how the role and function of UN Habitat can be enhanced to support these efforts. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Yesterday, I met with more than 500 students at the Catholic University of Quito to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals. The hunger of the students to embrace the SDGs and work for the achievement was inspiring. I encouraged them to be champions of change and drivers of action in the move to sustainability. Ultimately, our agendas are for the youth of today and their children and grandchildren. Therefore, teaching the SDG's in every classroom in the world is one of the primary aims I have set for the year ahead.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the United Nations General Assembly, I assure you that the United Nations are engaged in a universal push for meaningful progress on all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals. SDG 11 stands for sustainable cities and settlements, and I encourage you all to put your best ideas forward at Habitat III. In partnership with you, the United Nations will play its part in turning those ideas into meeting the targets of SDG 11.

Let us all ensure that the New Urban Agenda delivers on its high promise. Building inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities is fundamental to achieving the sustainable way of life we have set out to provide for future generations.

I thank you.