

**Statement by Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka  
Under Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-HABITAT at the High Level  
Panel to Commemorate International Women's Day,  
March 8, 2005**

Madam Chair

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,  
NGO participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored and privileged to participate in this high level panel to commemorate International Women's Day, March 8 2005 on the theme "Gender Equality Beyond 2005: Building a More Secure Future".

Let me start by expressing my warm appreciation to the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, for graciously giving me the opportunity to address you all today. I would like to extend my congratulations to Ms Rachel Mayanja on her appointment as Assistant Secretary General, and Special Adviser to the UN-Secretary General on Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women. This important cause could not have been placed in better hands. Ms. Mayanja's distinguished career and personal experience is bound to add new momentum to this struggle for gender equality globally.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

Women today constitute 70 percent of the poorest of the poor in the world, in spite of the actions undertaken by governments, non-governmental organizations, community based groups and the international community since the first Women's World Conference in Mexico in 1975. Although progress has been recorded in a number of areas the struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment continues.

It has long been established that a girl child's education is exchanged for collection of water and support in other household chores. Sanitation is an issue which intimately touches upon women's lives. It is about their dignity and privacy. Yet sanitation receives very little attention in developmental terms.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

On 12 February 2005, it was reported that two children, a girl aged four and her brother aged three were burnt to death beyond recognition when their house caught fire in

Huruma, a Nairobi slum. When the children felt hungry, they lit a fire to prepare some food. Their house and several others nearby were burnt down. The neighbors said that their mother, a single woman always locked up the children while she went out in search for work. The police carried away the charred remains, while the neighbors went to look for the mother in the city.

It is possible that in this particular location the fire brigade could not save the children because there were no roads to reach their house. Yet the neighbors could not help either because they had no water to extinguish the fire. This incident presents the grim reality and hardships faced by many women and children living in slums and informal settlement around the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

Against this grim back-drop, I would like to draw your attention to sustainable human settlements development, which has not received the adequate attention that it deserves in the last decade. It is my conviction that the battle for achieving the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals should be fought in human settlements where people live - in our cities, towns and villages. It is at this level that pro-poor policies and global commitments are translated into reality. It is here that local actions must and can deliver global goals. It is at this level that the benefits of all actions to reduce poverty will become visible.

Fifty years ago two thirds of all people on earth lived in the rural countryside. Fifty years from now, two-thirds of all people – six billion of us – will be living in the city. At present, 3 billion people, half the population of the planet, live in cities. Urbanization continues rapidly for a number of economic, social and political reasons. The flow of people from countryside to the city – from one culture to another and from one country to the other is the reality of our lives. Women have not been spared by this. Some women flee the country side for economic reasons, conflicts, gender inequality discrimination, and violence against them. Women, like many other poor people are on the move in search of a better life.

In the last 40 years, Latin America has experienced a rapid rate of urbanization such that today 75% of them live in urban areas. Over 30% of Latin American urbanites live in slums. Asia, which is home to 80% of humanity, is also urbanizing and currently 36% of Asians live in cities. Some of the world's biggest megapolis such as Mumbai, Calcutta, Bangkok have over 10 million people and between 1/3 and 1/2 of them live in slums. Africa is a bigger challenge because it is the fastest urbanizing continent, with 37% of Africans living in cities and the overwhelming majority are to be found in slums. Our projections show that by 2030, Africa will cease to be a rural continent as over 50% of its population will be in cities and towns – which is a matter of one generation. And under a business as usual scenario the majority will be in slums condemned to the most inhuman living conditions without access to safe drinking water, sanitation, decent shelter and

social services. For women life in the slums is not only a danger to health but also to privacy and dignity.

While cities are the attractions for investment, communication, commerce, production, consumption, and employment in a world of liberalized trade and finance, they are also the locus of problems that result from these profound economic and demographic trends. Poverty and hardships in rural areas tend to accelerate rural-to-urban migration, which in turn intensifies slum formation as the current city planning and management systems are unable to adequately cope with the massive urban population growth. This aggravates the urban slum-housing crisis we experience today.

A sizeable proportion of the new urban population, especially women, for lack of alternatives, engages in urban and peri-urban food production, for subsistence, making irrelevant the assumed disconnection between economic activity in rural and urban areas, as well as the division of labor between them. It is my opinion that for this reason rural and urban development should no longer be considered as separate, but rather as intricately linked and mutually reinforcing.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

As we reaffirm our commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it is important for our plans of action for implementation at national, regional and international level in the coming decade to focus on strengthening what have been identified as the weakest points in implementation and also to pay attention to those areas which were not initially included in the Beijing Platform for Action. We should not lose sight of the “spatial dimension” of a gender balanced sustainable development.

It is strategic to link the Beijing Platform for Action to the Millennium Development Declaration and Goals. To this end, I would like to re-echo the Secretary General’s voice at the opening of this 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women by requesting that we all consider adopting the seven forward looking strategic priorities identified by the Millennium Project Taskforce on Gender equality and empowerment which focus on strengthening opportunities for post primary education for girls, guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights, investing in infrastructure to reduce women’s and girls time burdens, guaranteeing women’s property and inheritance rights and here women’s access to land in both rural and urban areas remains a key issue reducing gender inequality in employment, increasing women’s representation in political bodies, combating violence against women, and improving data and indicators for monitoring progress. Our strategies should also target the thousands of illiterate women the world over. Through adult learning programmes these women could become empowered in the long run, and this will bring about positive development.

Efforts should be made to move beyond land policy and law reform to reforming the laws of succession which continued to disadvantage women even when progressive land and

property rights have been enacted. Many customary tenures continue to deny women the right to inherit land and property in matrimonial homes. It means the only way for women to own land is to buy it. And in many places, women have resorted to prostitution to raise money to buy land and thereafter become “respectable farmers” or landladies. These are the realities of our time – 10 years after Beijing.

We must also improve land administration and management, secure tenure, and property rights by undertaking practical steps to bring about real benefits to women. Given the challenges of urbanization and the high densities of people in peri-urban areas, it would be helpful to critically analyze housing policies and laws, urban planning and land use policies and programmes and advocate for change. As women, we should demand for effective urban planning, pro-poor and gender responsive housing policies and legislation including regulations for landlords and tenants relationships, and the provision of basic services like water, sanitation, health, and education and childcare facilities. This cannot happen unless we are part and parcel of a democratic participatory governance systems of local and national level.

To a large extent micro credit programmes have contributed towards the economic empowerment of women over the years. However, much more remains to be done to ensure that those women who require credit can access it, and those running small, medium and large scale enterprises are also assisted. Women entrepreneurs could initiate mentoring programmes to groom women in rural and urban areas especially those in the informal sector to start business enterprises. It would be useful, if housing development is taken up as a business by women for supporting women and men especially those living in slums and informal settlements. In this regard, UN-HABITAT has embarked on a special Real Estate option programme to empower low income urban women through land access and cooperative housing schemes.

In the coming decade women activists should diversify and venture into other new fields like transport, energy and communication including the use of information and communication technologies in the rural and urban areas. This is critical for keeping women connected with the outside world as they struggle to increase their participation in enterprise development and to trade globally in this knowledge based era.

Another area which requires urgent attention is the militarization of political conflicts, peacekeeping and security as they affect gender policies. The defense forces and other groups working in the area of peacekeeping should be sensitized to women’s human rights and the consequences of violence against women in all its various forms. There is a need to engage in constructive discussions with all stakeholders including communities, defense forces, the police and the leadership in conflict areas and peace keeping operations to address sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children. The international human rights standards that protect women against rape and sexual violence should be upheld and sanctions must be put in place for offenders.

The initiative by African women to discuss with their counterparts in the North matters related to peace and security should be supported. As a Commissioner on the Blair Commission for Africa, I have been doing my part with your help to present gender and women's economic empowerment recommendations and priorities to the Commission, whose report will be launched in London later this week. I can assure you the need to focus on the emancipation, liberation and advancement of the African women has received its due attention in the Blair Report on Africa's future. Now we must focus on implementation of those recommendations by all African governments and their G8 counterparts to whom the report is directed.

Facing the urban challenge, understanding deepening urban poverty, the plight of the homeless and slum dwellers is critical in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Women's economic empowerment strategies should also counter the growing urban poverty. With this in mind, I would like to urge the Women's Affairs Ministries, women's organizations, community based groups and the international community to support a three-part, integrated strategy that is both corrective and pre-emptive to address the rapid formation of slums, and which is likely to bring real benefits to women. Those three parts are:

- (i) Slum upgrading which involves: physical upgrading of houses, infrastructure, environment; social upgrading through improved education, health and secure tenure; and improving governance through participatory processes, community leadership and empowerment;
- (ii) Urban development involving stimulation of job creation through citywide advanced land use planning, development and management of the revenue base, infrastructural improvement, provision of amenities, city management and urban governance, community empowerment, vulnerability reduction and better security;
- (iii) Regional development which entails: reduction and diffusion of urbanization impacts through national urban policies and enabling laws that support secondary and tertiary cities, metropolitan governance and planning, management of integrated urban-rural economic and lifeline systems that will result in balanced rural-urban development, stemming the tide of growth of mega-cities with their huge populations and their ensuing problems.

In all this a gender impact assessment must be undertaken. It is important to recognize, support and monitor the role of municipalities and local authorities in promoting gender equality and the advancement of women. National strategies to promote gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes should also target municipal planning and development. Increasing women's participation in decision-making at the local government level, capacity building, and improving the knowledge and skills of local government officials are essential for promoting inclusiveness and transparency at the local level. The Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals should be localized if they are to be realized.

The involvement of youth in these activities is highly recommended, needless to say that these will be our leaders of the women's movement in future. It is also prudent to strategically involve men and boys in gender equality and women's empowerment activities. We need strategic male allies in this struggle if we are to make greater strides and sustain such gains.

The need for governments and the international community to adopt early warning systems for cities, towns and villages to prepare and reduce the impact of disasters whether natural or manmade is paramount. This could contribute towards safeguarding livelihoods, human settlements and associated basic services which are easily destroyed when such disasters strike. During post reconstruction special attention should be paid to women's secure tenure, rights to land and adequate housing among other issues. Property restitution must be gender sensitive.

At the first meeting of African Ministers Responsible for Housing Urban Development held in Durban, South Africa at the beginning of February this year, Ministers of Housing recognized the need for gender equality and women's empowerment to be an integral part of urban poverty reduction policies and programmes. They recommended that human settlements and the plight of the urban poor be a priority area for women's concern in the coming decade. This policy will be discussed at the upcoming 20<sup>th</sup> Session of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT, to be held 4-8 April 2005 in Nairobi. Its recommendations will then feed into the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development which will deal with water, sanitation and human settlements, and the review of the Millennium Development Goals by the General Assembly this Fall. The stakes for women in the "Habitat Agenda" now restated in MDG Goal 7 on environmental sustainability targets 10 and 11 on water, sanitation and slum upgrading are very high.

I therefore hope to see many of you in all these fora.

I thank you for your attention.