



Global Parliamentarians on **HABITAT**

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6th GPH
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Opening Statement

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GOOD LAWS FOR A BETTER HABITAT

Excellencies,
Honourable Colleagues and Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I must say how delighted I am for receiving this high distinction from the hands of Mr. Jorge Felipe, the president of this honourable house. Thank you very much.

Personally and on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, I would like to welcome you most warmly to our 6th Global Forum. I am glad that you have chosen to participate in our forum.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank the Camara of Rio de Janeiro, in the first place you, Mr. President, Jorge Felipe, for your warm welcome and your generous hospitality. Thank you for enabling us to hold our forum in the political and historical center of your exciting and dynamic metropolis.

Our special thanks go to our friend Eliomar Coelho, Municipal Councillor of Rio de Janeiro and a member of the Board of Directors of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat for America. Eliomar

Coelho has managed the difficult task of organizing this forum at very short notice professionally and with great creativity. I would also like to thank his excellent team, especially Mauricio Brito, for the very close and good cooperation.

Honourable Colleagues and Friends,

The year 2009 has been a very active and successful year for the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat. I will gladly report to you on our activities.

After many discussions, it became possible to initiate elections for the African Board of Directors.

Shortly after the election of the African Board, the first meeting of the African Chapter of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat was held in August 2009 in Kampala, Uganda.

The European Board of Directors also reconstituted itself in 2008. In a meeting in March 2009 in Brussels, Belgium, joint European projects were discussed.

The members of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat also met within the framework of the twenty-

second Governing Council of UN-Habitat in April last year in Nairobi, Kenya. The Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, among other things, adopted a Resolution which was presented at the closing session of the Governing Council. We also showed a strong presence at the celebration of World Habitat Day last year in Washington DC. At a meeting of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat and the Board of Directors, preparations for the next World Conference were made.

Last year we also worked hard to provide you with a new website on which you can inform yourself on the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat and their current activities. You are now able to download the minutes of our meetings from our website www.gph-habitat.de/en. The website is supported by the German Bundestag and will be further completed and expanded during the course of this year.

We face many tasks which need to be completed this year. Senator Rodolfo G. Biazon from the Philippines, who has provided leadership to the Asian members of the GPH (since 1994) for many years and with great dedication as President of the Asian Regional Council of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, has

decided to resign. We now have to find a suitable successor. Conversations with our Asian friends from the Philippines and Indonesia were held this afternoon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Global Parliamentarians on Habitat meet regularly at the provincial, regional, and international level to seek solutions for the most serious challenges in the field of sustainable urban development. Our organization was founded in 1987 with the aim of supporting UN-Habitat. Direct contact with UN-Habitat and its partners remains a particularly important concern to the Global Parliamentarians to this day.

At this point I would once again like to thank Dr. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, very warmly for the good cooperation of the last few years. We are also thankful for her invitation to the World Urban Forum V, which is taking place next week also in Rio de Janeiro. She will come to us on Saturday morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Global Forum is the sixth forum since 1996. In 1996, the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat held their first forum parallel to the Conference on Human Settlements HABITAT II in Istanbul. I remember well how the President of the Board of Directors of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat of the time, Oscar Lopez Velarde Vega, spoke to me at the Istanbul conference fourteen years ago and asked me to collaborate as president for Europe. Oscar has been the motor and the heart of our organisation for many years and is up to the present day one of its most important drivers.

I would never have dreamed that, fourteen years later, I would speak to you as one of his successors in the Camara of Rio de Janeiro. I am extremely pleased that Oscar is with us today.

It is a pleasure to remember a row of successful Forums of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, in Cancun, Mexico, in Manila, Philippines, in Berlin, Germany, and in Rabat, Morocco, or in Monterrey, the home of our friend Senator Eloy Cantu Segovia from Mexico, who has also carried the responsibility for the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat as President of the Board of Directors for many years. I

would like to thank Eloy and his staff for their valuable support in the preparation of this forum. Important decisions for the future of our organisation in America will be taken this afternoon.

Parliamentarians have once again gathered together in Rio from around the world to discuss sustainable urban development. In the coming days, we want to ask ourselves how we can enable slum dwellers to participate in the social life of a city through better laws, how we can better combine economy and ecology in urban development. In June 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the representatives of our planet took far-reaching decisions that are still a benchmark for political action. Next to the Habitat Agenda of Istanbul, they are the basis of our political work.

As a representative of the people we vote on laws. Moreover, as parliamentarians, we control the budget of our country and can thus ensure that the necessary financial resources are available at national and international level. We have unique and effective tools with which we can influence the quality of our cities.

The challenges in the field of human settlements are as big as they are numerous. It is necessary, in the few precious days that we have, to limit ourselves in our discussions to special topics in order to better respond to them. For our 6th Global Forum, the Board of Directors has chosen the following priorities: Climate Change, Cities for All and Urban-Rural Linkages.

Climate change remains the greatest social, political and economic challenge of the coming decades. Financial resources are important in order to be able to respond to this challenge, especially against the background of the global economic and financial crisis, whose consequences we are still battling to overcome. But financial resources alone are not enough. We must face this challenge with greater intellectual resources, with young minds and creative ideas.

We want to involve all the inhabitants of a city in the social life of their city. We need to provide them with access to education. The poorest inhabitants of a city are those who live in slums or favelas, who are in the most difficult situation economical and social situation. They need perspectives for their future.

Then the poorest inhabitants can, through their participation, bring about many positive changes for themselves.

The areas surrounding the cities often play an important role in the food production for the city. In these areas the urbanization processes and the environmental impact through garbage and sewage disposal from the nearest cities are often especially strong. Since cities and their surrounding areas are often divided, a better and closer cooperation between the municipality and the administration of the surrounding communities is necessary in order to address many of these challenges.

The next few days we want to take a closer look at these three issues. We want to draft a "Declaration of Rio de Janeiro" from the results of our discussions. Our model, which is the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, is great. We do not want to and we cannot emulate this declaration. Rather, we intend to jointly find ways how we can make our cities more sustainable in every respect. We want to work out common positions, carry them into our national parliaments and request our

Governments to act.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We will present the results of our discussions next week of the World Urban Forum of UN-Habitat. I would like to invite you to join our Round Table discussion on Tuesday afternoon. This conference is also intended as a platform for meetings. We want to learn from each other. We want to share our experiences and seek ways in which improvements can be achieved for the people. Above all, we want to discuss what contributions we can make through better laws. And these days we should think about people in Haiti and Chile, who face immense challenges after the catastrophes they experienced.

I am glad you have all come to Rio de Janeiro and for this I would like to thank you. Tonight we will celebrate our meeting and get to know each other. I am looking forward to fruitful discussions and to our common endeavour to initiate positive changes. Working for a better world is worthwhile.

Thank you for your attention.

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