

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Statement by
Dr. Markandey Rai
Chief, Global parliamentarians

On behalf of

Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka
Executive Director of UN-HABITAT
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
On the occasion of the meeting of the
Global Parliamentarians on Habitat.
Washington DC, 6th October 2009

Honourable Peter Goetz, President of Global Parliamentarians on Habitat (GPH)
Honourable Members of the Board of Directors of the Global Parliamentarians on
Habitat,
Honourable Margaret Zziwa, President of the GPH African Chapter
Honourable Mariam Nalubega, Aternate President of GPH African Chapter,
Honourable Members of the Board of Director of GPH
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President,

I wish thank the President of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat Hon. Peter Goetz for inviting me to speak today on behalf of our Executive Director, Mrs. Tibaijuka, whose schedule has prevented her from joining us here.

UN-HABITAT is delighted that you have chosen to meet on the occasion of the global celebration of World Habitat Day here in Washington.

Honourable Parliamentarians,

I will be brief because I know that many of you have pressing matters to attend to here with members of the United States Congress and other important personalities.

And I know too that many of you have travelled great distances to join us here for the World Habitat celebration.

Your support in our quest for better, smarter and sustainable towns and cities in this time of economic downturn and in the face of more and more climate change problems is commendable. Your decision during our last Governing Council meeting in April to strengthen the African and Asian chapters of Global Parliamentarians on Habitat could not be more timely. So I am delighted to see the African chapter so well represented here in this important Washington week.

As you build up the Asia-Pacific chapters, we are happy to learn also that you are in close touch with members of the United States Congress with a view to expanding our North American network.

Honourable ladies and gentlemen,

We must press home to our American friends and hosts that we find ourselves today in a situation where we have no time to lose when it comes to the fast urbanising developing countries, now home to roughly 1 billion slum dwellers.

As the agency for the built environment, UN-HABITAT works to promote a better urban future for us all. It is our job to monitor progress on the Millennium Development Goals as we move beyond the halfway point towards the 2015 target year.

As we do that, I just want us to take a quick look at the figures: Our latest research shows that sub-Saharan Africa today still has the world's highest proportion of its city dwellers living in slums. They constitute 62 percent of Africa's urban populations. That compares to 43 percent in South Asia, 37 percent in East Asia, 28 percent in Southeast Asia, 27 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 15 percent in North Africa.

As high and volatile food and energy prices have pushed at least 100 million people around the world back into poverty. Indeed, slums are multiplying, urban crime is rampant, development keeps sprawling, transport efficiency is declining, energy costs are rising, and health problems are increasing, while people in many countries are walling themselves off from others in gated communities. We now face the prospect that our efforts and those of Member States to meet the Millennium Development Goals and reduce poverty, ill health, hunger and the shelter crisis will be rolled back.

What's happening here? Has planning failed and does it need to be replaced by a more effective function?

In our search for the answers, we should not despair. When it comes to urban planning, the theme of World Habitat Day this year, there is much we can learn from this great country.

I wish to cite here the wonderful examples of Chicago's new climate change mitigation plans, and Washington's role as a *human rights city*. These are inspiring

examples that show us the way forward in adversity. They are examples to this nation, and countries the world over.

I would also like to add here that as the world grows more and more urban, it is vital that, as governments accept urbanisation as a positive trend, that planning fulfils its proper role in guiding urban development when it comes to improving access to services, and economic and social opportunities.

Innovative ideas such as systematically including youth—a demographic section that in many countries is significantly large—as participants in the planning processes and empowering local groups to oversee their implementation – will go a long way in rejuvenating the planning function.

Urban planning will therefore have to continue to adapt so it is able to carry out its much-required effective role in shaping a positive urban future.

Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the elected representatives of voters, Parliamentarians are close to the aspirations and wishes of the people. You have a direct and critical role to play in the improvement of the lives of the world's urban poor.

Indeed we at UN-HABITAT are only too aware that Parliamentarians hold the keys when it comes to legislating for a better urban future, for sustainable, cleaner, safer, greener, more caring inclusive cities that enshrine the rights of their citizens, especially women. In most countries it is you who set the laws and manage the funding.

Your duty is to hold governments accountable to their international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction. What is expected is coherent action by governments in delivering on their promises, and by parliamentarians in holding their governments to account.

For UN-HABITAT, this vital partnership with parliamentarians helps ensure that shelter and urban poverty reduction are addressed in national policies

We at UN-HABITAT therefore hail you for the way you are strengthening the regional chapters of Global Parliamentarians on Habitat.

As you are aware, UN-HABITAT has adopted a Medium Term Strategic and Institution Plan for the years 2008-2013. This august body can promote and support our plan by sensitizing the parliamentarians to collect the legislation passed, tabled or under discussion on the housing and human settlements. It is important for us to share your initiatives with countries around the world.

UN-HABITAT has prepared a strategy paper on working with Parliamentarians which was discussed at our last meeting in Nairobi. Further advice was solicited.

Now, our next opportunity is in Barcelona, Spain where Steering Committee on UN-HABITAT's new World Urban Campaign meets from 12 to 14 October followed by an

Expert Group meeting on the partnership strategy paper. Your active participation and valuable comments will be very helpful to finalize the partnership strategy paper and also the strategy paper on working with parliamentarians.

Mr. President,

Now you are elected and your party is in power in Germany, allow me to request that you use your good offices to organize a meeting for UN-HABITAT with the Development Committee, and also the Ministry of Development, where we can have a presentation on our role and work in addressing the issue of housing and sustainable urbanization. Your continuous support to UN-HABITAT is necessary.

I am confident that very soon the GPH will have their action plans and revised and updated statute in the form of Charter of the Global parliamentarians under which they will promote more membership and secure funds for executing their plans.

I am inviting you all to come to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the fifth gathering of World Urban Forum in March 2009. A roundtable meeting of Parliamentarians will be organized on the theme of Climate Change and Human Settlements in follow-up to matters discussed at the Nanjing Forum last year.

I wish a very successful meeting and looking forward to receiving the report on the deliberation and outcome of the meeting.

Thank you for your kind attention.