



Global Parliamentarians on **HABITAT**

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Panel Speech



**“Sustainable Urban Development through Expanding
Equitable Access to Land, Housing, Basic Services
and Infrastructure”**

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The spoken word prevails!

GOOD LAWS FOR A BETTER HABITAT

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Excellencies,
Honourable Colleagues and Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to bring you the best greetings from the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat.

We are grateful that UN-HABITAT focus their attention again and again on the important challenges which humanity faces. This includes, among many other issues, the equitable access to adequate housing.

The world is rapidly changing. In the middle of the 19th (nineteenth) Century, three out of ten people lived in urban areas. Today it is more than half. Towards the end of the century, two thirds of the world's population will live in cities or urban centres, of which 1.4 (one point four) billion people will live in slums or favelas. Urbanization and the steering of this urbanization into a sustainable direction therefore has to be the theme of the 21st (twenty-first) Century.

Against this background, but also against the background of the global financial and economic crisis which is not yet overcome, an international dialogue is more important than ever.

The questions we must ask ourselves are not whether cities will continue to grow, but how, where and in which cities we want to live in the future.

If we don't adapt our cities to this growth trend right now, this will have a strong negative impact on our Housing supply. Housing will become more scarce, more expensive and its quality will become worse. We must act - not tomorrow, but today!

Equitable access to adequate housing must be regarded in the overall context of an integrated sustainable urban development. This is because cities are places where all problems come together in a very confined space.

The right to adequate housing is a universal right that is enshrined on international level and in over a hundred national constitutions. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and Necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. " (Article 25 (1))

Many countries have implemented this right in their national legislations. Many different methods are used to ensure that poor people get access to adequate housing.

For example in my country, Germany, we have a social aid and a tax aid. In the first case, assistance is provided to the subject, namely the poor person. In the second case, assistance is provided for the construction of the object.

Today, we have a different supply of housing in Germany. The focus of government support is the energetic improvement of buildings, in order to increase the energy efficiency of buildings and to keep housing cheap even in the face of rising energy costs. In recent years in Germany, 2.5 (two point five) million homes have been renovated or newly constructed in order to improve their energy efficiency this way.

Even in Europe there are still millions of people who either have no housing at all, or who live in expensive or poor quality housing. In the majority of developing countries, the situation is much worse. Often it is the combination of a very rapid urbanization and weak economic growth which is so destructive.

Without sufficient financial resources and clear guidelines, many cities are already today not able to meet the needs of their residents. Therefore, the cities increasingly become a collecting basin for the poor. The poor population in these cities is not only denied equitable access to housing, but also to land, infrastructure and basic services.

Even in industrialized countries many people continue to grapple with poor or expensive housing. Whether and how we succeed in steering the global urbanization process into a sustainable direction, will massively influence the quality of future living conditions of mankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We parliamentarians have a special responsibility in addressing these complex challenges. We have to demand clear rules in our national legislation with regard to sustainable urban development and we need to make sure that increased funding is made available for the implementation of these laws.

In all this, the people must always be at the heart of our efforts. There can be no question of simply eliminating slums. These often consist of grown social structures that positively influence the quality of life of their residents in spite of all problems.

Sometimes these social structures are essential for survival. Many people do not wish to be "transplanted" to a new location or a new district. First and foremost, we should therefore consider the wishes of the residents in the slums or favelas, and enhance their neighbourhoods in close cooperation with them.

In my opinion, people not only have a right to housing, they also have the right to participate in decision-making. In addition, people who are involved in improving their neighbourhood identify more strongly with it. They obtain ownership of it. Walls which were previously painted with graffiti stay clean.

But a strong and well-organized civil society is necessary for these kinds of projects, and sometimes it is necessary to start by empowering communities first.

It is not only developing and transition countries which are struggling to provide their residents with adequate

housing; many industrial countries have to seek to upgrade their inner city areas. It must be our aim to promote solidarity between developing and developed countries. We can learn much from each other.

The Global Parliamentarians on Habitat aim to improve this kind of cooperation through their parliamentary network. It is just as important that parliamentarians talk with the public, government representatives, non-governmental organizations, urban planners and business representatives on how improvements can be achieved.

This is why it was a pleasure for me to come to Nairobi together with many MPs, especially from Africa. We parliamentarians had productive discussions yesterday which made clear the importance of the cooperation of all stakeholders. In order to improve the lives of the people, we need responsible new partnerships at all levels of government.

In particular, parliamentarians and the cities must be more involved in this political process. The major problems of the future lie in the cities. It is therefore only possible to resolve the problems together with the cities.

In the same way, when it comes to climate change, cities are, on the one hand, contributors to climate change. In cities, about 80 percent of the world's energy resources are consumed. Cities also produce the majority of emissions. Urban areas will be most strongly affected by climate change, because many of them are located close to the coast or along rivers.

On the other hand, cities can and must make the most important contributions to climate protection, in urban planning or when it comes to improving the energy efficiency of city-owned buildings.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need a competition between cities for the best climate protection as an incentive for sustainable urban development and good housing.

Ten years after the Habitat II conference in Istanbul, we parliamentarians initiated a comprehensive study for Europe. This study looks at the changes in legislation after the Habitat Agenda of 1996 in Istanbul. Thus, the development of the legislation of Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Romania and Turkey and in a second part between Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland were compared. The study was completed in 2008.

As a result of the research, it was found that the overall objectives in pursuit of the Habitat Agenda vary widely depending on the level of development of the country in question.

It was also found that countries with economic problems or undergoing political reforms were particularly grateful for impulses from the outside, which encourage them to pursue the Habitat Agenda. This can be done by entering into international agreements or through incentive-providing economic aid programs.

We would very much appreciate it if this study were not only limited to Europe but would be extended to also include other countries around the world. Through this comparative study, it has become apparent which countries have implemented their commitments within ten years and which ones have not done so. This "making visible" increases political pressure on legislative action. It is only when we know the present situation that we can improve something about it. In addition, the study has helped in filtering out "best practices".

As an international organization of parliamentarians, it was at the time difficult for us to get funding for the study. Ultimately, we succeeded in convincing the federal government in Germany of the importance of this study. Mr. Chair, a global comparison would certainly be a good basis for discussions at Istanbul +20 in 2016 and an interesting challenge for UN-HABITAT.

Mr. Chair,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by making some remarks on the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat. We are a unique group of parliamentarians that deal exclusively with the habitat topic. We represent more than 200 delegates from over 180 countries. The Global Parliamentarians on Habitat celebrate their 25th year of existence next year. Our organization was founded by parliamentarians to support UN-HABITAT in its activities. In particular, we want to implement the objectives of the Habitat Agenda adopted fourteen years ago in Istanbul at all political levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We know that the future of humanity will be decided in the cities. It is therefore right and proper that the United Nations increasingly include cities as equal partners in policy making decisions.

It is only together that we can overcome the enormous challenges ahead. Our most important resource is the political will. If everyone makes a contribution in their area of responsibility, we have a chance to create a better future for our children.

Thank you for your attention.

Concluding Remarks

Thank you for this really interesting discussion and the good input we have received. I'll try to give a political answer and bring it together in one point.

We have to bring urbanisation into the focus of our politics more than before, on all political levels. We have to change the politics in our countries and work together more than ever. That is what we need in the future.

The Global Parliamentarians on Habitat meet regularly at national, regional, and global level to find solutions to key challenges in the field of sustainable urban development and housing.

I would like to invite you to our 7th Global Forum in Croatia in Europe. The Forum will take place in May this year in the beautiful port city of Zadar. The theme of the conference is "Good Laws for a Better Habitat". We will be looking closely at climate change in cities and its impact on coastal cities. I invite you to join our discussion in Zadar.