

# **Remarks by Ambassador David Roet, Israel Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, for the US/Canada/Israel Team, 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements/Sustainable Transport**

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I am pleased to be delivering this statement on behalf of our team—Canada, Israel and the United States.

We know that urbanization is occurring at an unprecedented scale and rate. This was made clear by all the panelists yesterday, as well as the TST background paper.

Sixty percent of areas anticipated to be urban by 2030 are not yet built, creating enormous opportunities for investments in sustainability.

The TST issues brief surveys some current trends in urbanization, and makes clear the imperative of *sustainable* urbanization. If well planned, developed and managed, cities will be powerful drivers of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Cities and urbanization dynamics are therefore critical to sustainable development. Our work must be relevant to the majority of the world's population who live in cities, and the post-2015 development agenda must reflect an integrated understanding of urban dynamics and issues.

The question is not whether our agenda can promote sustainable cities, but how. We will make three points and one concluding observation.

Cities reinforce need for multi-stakeholders.

First, cities offer a compelling demonstration of why the post-2015 development agenda needs to promote meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement. Local and municipal actors

need to be centrally engaged along with other partners from civil society, the private sector, the science and research community, and so on.

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure is a good example of what can be achieved through multi-stakeholder engagement. The issue of land is at the core of urban development, and security of tenure is a key factor in people's decision to build and invest responsibly, to promote social harmony, and protect the environment.

We agree with the High Level Panel that "cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost". Our focus should be not only on the direct threats cities face, but also on their potential to identify and deliver solutions.

This requires a multi-stakeholder, multi-sector approach that engages the private sector, civil society, local authorities, as well as networks of cities, such as the C40, connecting the world's megacities in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Problem-solving should allow for city dwellers and communities, including the most vulnerable, to play a decisive role.

Engagement of the private sector should also be maximized, both in its own right and in the form of public-private partnerships. Many urban development initiatives have enormous potential to mobilize private investment and public-private partnerships in everything from sustainable transport to residential solutions.

We heard a little bit about bicycle sharing programs yesterday, which are gaining in popularity in cities around the world. These programs are a great example of the kinds of solutions that can be generated by public-private partnerships.

We believe we would benefit in our own process from hearing more from dynamic urban leaders around the world not just about their challenges and solutions, but also about what they would find useful in an international framework such as the one we are trying to elaborate.

Second, cities are hubs of creativity and innovation. Cities are often at the forefront of policy innovation. They concentrate people, ideas, and resources in ways that can be powerful drivers of positive change.

Our agenda should help to promote the ability of city leaders, urban communities, and individuals to innovate. Enabling conditions should be created to spur technological solutions, including green technologies, as well as social entrepreneurship to address local and context-specific challenges. Supporting good governance is also extremely important.

Third, many issues we are discussing are highly relevant for cities and urban-dwellers, while also being relevant for others – energy; water and sanitation; sustainable infrastructure, especially transport; obviously also health, education, jobs, and so on.

If we can build on what was said by our colleague from Guatemala yesterday, even without specifying that a given goal or target is about cities, a framework that includes, for example, targets on access to safe drinking water and sanitation, increasing energy efficiency buildings and transport, or expanding secure rights to land, property, and other assets can powerfully support urban sustainability.

Climate change is also a particular concern, and city planning and management needs to give due regard to climate diagnostics and disaster impact. Cities are some of the most vulnerable areas to natural disasters and increasing their resilience is critical for cities across the world.

Finally, we come back to the issue of how best to craft an agenda that is relevant to cities and our shared priority of sustainable urbanization, which we agree is a high common priority. We are open to different ideas. We are not initially convinced that a stand-alone goal on cities, or urban-specific targets, is the best way to address these complex issues. In particular, we believe it is essential not to reinforce an artificial or static understanding of the rural-urban divide, as we heard from our Pakistani colleague and others yesterday, or to oversimplify complex, shifting demographics. For example, territorial cohesion and urban-rural linkages are crucial and as cities grow, there is a pressing need to enhance infrastructure that connects urban centers with rural towns or villages. Sustainable transport will obviously be key in this regard, especially for increasing access to job opportunities and services in urban areas. But transport is a cross-cutting issue, affecting, affecting rural and urban areas alike, local, regional and national commerce, international trade, human mobility, public health and the environment.

We are therefore more attracted to an approach that emphasizes targets relevant to urban dwellers—such as addressing urban priorities like improved energy efficiency in buildings, or incorporating the recycling or treatment of all municipal and industrial wastewater prior to discharge in our approach to water and sanitation.

As we set out to elaborate the post-2015 development framework, we must therefore seize the opportunity that cities represent, as well as think through carefully the most impactful and constructive way to do that. As we heard yesterday—we need to look at the big picture, and ensure that our framework can predict and address future challenges.

In conclusion, Mr. Co-Chair, allow me to briefly react to a comment you made in your opening remarks yesterday, relating to the final report of this group, and what it might contain. Our team will raise additional procedural matters later on this week, but we think it is important to clarify one point at this stage. You mentioned yesterday that there was agreement on using the Rio outcome document as the narrative accompanying the SDGs. Our understanding, following the brief and rather spontaneous discussion at the end of the December meeting, was that we would bracket the issue of narrative, in order to focus on goals and targets, despite not having reached consensus about what that narrative should be. We look forward to the opportunity to exchange views on how we envision the final report. We think this is an essential step as we look towards the next phase of our work.

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.

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