

# **Habitat III**

## **A High Level Event on**

### **"Urban resilience and Sustainable urban development in Small Island Developing States"**

A High Level Event on "Urban resilience and Sustainable urban development in Small Island Developing States" was held on Tuesday 18 October 2016 on the occasion of Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador. The event was co-organized by Maldives (Chair of AOSIS), UN-DESA, UN-OHRLS, and UN-Habitat, and was attended by 70 participants from governmental officials, UN agencies, civil society, and academia including many students.

**Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya**, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS) moderated the session. In his opening remarks, the USG noted that Habitat III is a unique opportunity for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to integrate their specific challenges and opportunities to sustainable urban planning and to promote a new model of urban development for equity, welfare and shared prosperity for their people. Mr. Acharya also highlighted the importance of coherent, effective and holistic implementation of the New Urban Agenda, in tandem with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SAMOA Pathway, the Sendai Framework, as well as Paris Climate Agreement, which will set SIDS on a path of greater resilience in achieving sustainable development.

Following the opening session, delegates from SIDS shared their experiences on urbanization in respective countries. **H.E. Mr. Denis St. Elmo Kellman**, Minister of Housing, Lands and Rural Development of Barbados, said that the country has more than 60 percent of their population living in urban corridors on the coastal area, and that urbanization has caused loss of agricultural lands and protected water zones. The Minister noted that Barbados' Physical Development Plan is being amended to make cities more resilient in view of the implementation of SDG11. Mr. Kellman outlined that the government is transitioning to a green economy to reduce vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks, with specific land use policies being planned to encourage sustainability.

**Honourable Mr. Powes Parkop**, Member of Parliament, Governor for National Capital District, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, described the diverse cultures of the country, which has about one thousand tribes and over 860 languages. Tribal conflicts undermine the security of its citizens, particularly women and girls. The city of Port Moresby has set goals for becoming a healthy, clean, and safe city, and is working on building peace and security, and reducing violence especially for women and girls. The city has significant informal settlements, accounting for about 40 percent of the population, the majority of which lack access to public services including utilities. Mr. Parkop highlighted that rapid rate of migration to the cities, particularly due to the growing rate of informal settlements are major challenge.

After the presentations by delegations from SIDS, their partners shared their views and experiences in supporting sustainable development of SIDS. **H.E. Mr. Marco Filippo Tornetta**, Ambassador of Italy to Ecuador, emphasized that Italy is a long-standing partner to SIDS. Italy is a co-chair of the Steering Committee for Partnerships for SIDS, and has hosted a conference on ocean health in March this year, as well as the Ministerial Meeting on Food Security and Climate Adaptation in SIDS in Expo Milano in

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October 2015. Ambassador Tornetta emphasized that food security and its relation with climate change are key issues for sustainable urban development in SIDS. Italy is promoting initiatives to help SIDS in this sector, to make sure that food production, processing and commercialization are climate-resilient and sustainable in the long term: Rural-urban linkages need to be strengthened and build sustainable and inclusive food systems. He also noted the importance of ensuring the access to sustainable energy and fresh water, another area in which Italy is intervening in SIDS. Mr. Tornetta commended SIDS' leadership in their achievement for the Paris Agreement, and expressed Italy's commitment to support SIDS in their endeavors.

**Mr. Raf Tuts**, Director, Programme Division, UN-Habitat, began by providing context to urban issues in SIDS. He noted that there are common stresses across SIDS with 62% of SIDS populations living in urban areas. SIDS are very low density with high urban sprawl, both of which are viewed as unsustainable. Other challenges for SIDS include inadequate land management systems, and increased demand for land planning due to rapid population growth. Mr. Tuts suggested numerous solutions to improve urban sustainability in SIDS, starting with encouraging more compact urban forms for climate resilience and population density. He also suggested that integrating the human rights based approach to urban planning could benefit many citizens.

**Mr. Jean D'Aragon**, Senior Sustainable Development Expert, UN Office for Sustainable Development, discussed the Vanuatu case example where 80% of the urban population lives in the capital and its periphery, reaching an annual growth of 11%. The area is particularly exposed to storms, flooding, earthquakes, and climate change impacts such as sea level rise. 30-40% of its population lives in informal settlements with inadequate access to basic services making them even more vulnerable to these hazards. When Vanuatu was hit by Cyclone Pam in 2015, the country's relatively low number of fatalities (11) was attributed to efficient early warning systems in place, reaching the population, even in remote areas, as well as rapid evacuation in cyclone-resilient shelters that were either already existing or erected collectively just a few hours before the cyclone hit. In the recovery process, a national consultation to improve disaster risk reduction and recovery in urban areas, highlighted the need for informal settlements upgrading promoting compactness, greater integration of nature-based solutions and traditional knowledge, and adapting to social requirements and context as part of the solution alongside scientific knowledge, principles that are also present in the SAMOA Pathway, the Sendai Framework, SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda.

In the open discussions, participants discussed specific issues on urbanization in SIDS. Adverse impact of climate change continues to threaten cities in SIDS, thus most participants echoed that climate change must be integrated into urban planning in SIDS. Some participants noted that enhanced adaptation to climate change and urban resilience could be a cost-effective component of sustainable urban development in SIDS.

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Financing for sustainable urban planning is significant and engaging stakeholders particularly private sector is key. Securing public budget is essential for the implementation of urban policies and defining roles of stakeholders in the process is important. Support from the international community remains crucial.

Tourism is a key enabler for economic growth of SIDS. Barbados has adopted a new tourism plan that aims to increase benefits from the tourism industry to advantage all local communities. In Papua New Guinea, insecurity due to violence is perhaps a hindrance for greater tourism, therefore peace and security is one of the top priorities in the country. An expert noted that tourism provides an opportunity for governments to define how best to use land in SIDS particularly coastal area.

Land use is crucial in sustainable urban planning. UN-Habitat, with University of West Indies and Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, supported SIDS to develop land policy management and provided global policy guideline on land policy management for SIDS. Land management is a cross-cutting issue, therefore needs to involve many institutions and stakeholders at national and local levels.

Informal settlements remain a challenge in SIDS. Upgrading of informal settlement require large amount of investment into infrastructure, as well as caution for local cultural relationships, tribal and/or indigenous communities and other sensitivities. Governor Parkop, Papua New Guinea, noted that land rights and entitlements are also challenging as much of the land in informal settlement are owned by traditional land owners (e.g. tribe leaders). The governor said that with the right support, communities in the City of Port Moresby could effectively contribute to the city's economic activities. Mr. Parkop also noted that unplanned settlement does not always mean that the residents are poor, as some lands are owned by private corporations.

The discussion also noted that the definition of rural-urban development varies from one country to another and that this is often reflected in the data on defining "urban" – an issue in need of further discussion in the SIDS context. Action on urban-rural linkages in SIDS could include enhancing infrastructure and housing, upgrading informal settlements, protection of ecosystems, and access to energy and water, as well as connectivity between rural and urban spaces, agriculture, amongst others. Mr. Kellman stressed that Barbados has successful systems on education, health, and housing that equally benefit the two areas. The country has engaged the tourism industry in its rural areas to expand economic opportunity by building hotels in rural areas.

The moderator closed the meeting by emphasizing the importance of robust partnerships, financing, and capacity building for sustainable urbanization in SIDS. The USG emphasized the commitment of UN-OHRLLS and UN-DESA to continue supporting the Steering Committee on Partnerships for SIDS, led by Maldives and Italy.