

**First Session of the  
Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals  
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**Statement by  
the United Nations Human Settlements Programme  
(UN-Habitat)**

Urbanization has a transformational role to play in delivering sustainable development. No country has ever reached middle income status in a sustainable manner without urbanizing. Generally cities are able to deliver higher levels of human development at relatively lower rates of environmental degradation. As concentrated nodes of consumption and production, cities generate a majority of the world's wealth as well as a majority of its greenhouse gas emissions, however, they still produce fewer per capita emissions than their surrounding areas. Yet cities are still struggling with unsustainable spatial patterns and persistent inequalities.

UN-Habitat is the focal point with the UN system for the implementation and monitoring of Millennium Development Goal 7, specifically the target on achieving a significant improvement in the life of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. UN-Habitat also contributes within the UN system to the implementation and monitoring of the target related to water and sanitation. Though the absolute slum improvement target has been achieved twice over, progress has been uneven across countries. Moreover, 100 million additional slum dwellers were added in the wake of this success. There are now approximately 1 Billion slum dwellers worldwide. The scale of the demographic shift to urban areas and its related challenges were clearly underestimated.

UN-Habitat agrees that the Sustainable Development Goals must be based on proportional -- not absolute -- targets. They must also be differentiated to their relative contexts. They must be able to be measured at a finer scale to account for inequalities within city-regions. And they must address the drivers behind the challenges that come with rapid and unplanned growth that results in phenomena such as slums and urban sprawl. Once slums and urban sprawl have occurred, it is expensive and difficult to remedy them. Last year, some 20 Member States met in Rabat, Morocco, to review the Millennium Development Goal target on slums. They concluded that the Sustainable Development Goals must address developmental drivers such as urbanization head on. Indeed urbanization must be targeted if its positive efficiencies are to generate wealth, improve the quality of life and yield more compact, integrated and connected cities.

However, business as usual will not lead to sustainable development. By 2030, 60 per cent of the world's population is expected to be urban. At the same time 60 per cent of the land area anticipated to be urban by then *has yet to be built*. Much of this implicates the world's fastest growing cities, which are often the least capacitated and may have relatively weak environmental and labour regulations. But their impact extends far beyond their boundaries. The goal of sustainable urbanization is, therefore, a global, trans-boundary goal best achieved through cooperation at the international level.

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