

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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FORMER UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL

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AT

THE OFFICIAL OPENING

OF

THE BERLIN HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE

ON

RIO+20 DECISIONS

ON

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND TRANSPORTATION

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In my capacity as the Chairman of the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS), I have the pleasure to convey my very warm greetings of welcome to all the participants who have joined us from various parts of the globe at the Berlin High Level Dialogue on Implementing Rio+20 Decisions on Sustainable Cities and Transport.

This high level event, being held in the state-of-the-art conference facilities of EUREF-Campus, is taking place on the first anniversary of what is popularly known as the Rio+20 summit where the world leaders came together last year to take advantage of the generational opportunity available 20 years after the 1992 Earth Summit - which I had the pleasure of attending - "to work together for a prosperous, secure and sustainable future for our people and our planet" and to craft "the future we want".

I extend my special thanks to the large number of policy makers and leaders, city government and municipal representatives, UN entities and other international organizations, public transport organizations and companies, and various participants from the host country Germany for their engaged presence contributing to the success of the Dialogue.

I am impressed by the collaborative spirit that has brought together so many partners in the organization of this event. UN-DESA deserves our particular thanks for its leadership in organizing this substantive contribution for follow up of the Rio+20 decisions. The Dialogue's other co-organizers German Federal Agency for Environment (UBA), UN-HABITAT, GFHS, UN Office for Partnerships and the German Innovation Center for Mobility and Social Change (INNOZ) - all deserve our appreciation.

I would also recognize Secretary-General of the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS) Lu Haifeng for his commitment and efforts for the success of the Dialogue.

At the outset, let me assert that the core of the wide-ranging objectives in both the Rio summits held twenty years apart has been the essential concept of SUSTAINIBILITY. Centrality of sustainability in our entire endeavour for global development, progress and prosperity can not be under-estimated. Sustainable development is the fundamental, intergenerational responsibility of our societies' efforts which are just, equitable and inclusive for economic and social stability and growth that benefits all.

Our world is going through a very significant turning point in relation to human settlements and urbanization. Beginning in 2008 for the first time, more than half of humanity is now living in towns and cities. A new urban era is a reality. It is projected that globally urbanization levels will rise dramatically in the next 40 years to reach 70 percent by 2050 when the world population is expected to hit 9 billion.

Urban growth is most rapid in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5 million residents every month. As cities grow in size and population, harmony among the spatial, social and environmental aspects of a city and between their inhabitants becomes of paramount importance.

Some years ago the annual World Habitat Day chose the theme *Harmonious Cities* focusing on the state of the world's growing cities and our planet's rapid and irreversible urbanization. The Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations call for a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. At the same time, it is essential that the growth and expansion of urban areas do not come at the expense of the natural environment.

The importance of cities as living space needs particular attention as these are also the places where the ecological

and social challenges of the 21st century are particularly pronounced. Part of these challenges is also the growing mobility and the accessibility of our cities.

A transport crisis of major proportions is looming on the horizon in many of the world's cities. Increasing motorization and air pollution threaten economic development as well as the environment. The importance of sustainable transportation in cities cannot be overstated. It is the backbone of any successful city and vital to building cities which are clean, equitable, accessible and economically viable.

The term sustainable transportation came into use as a logical follow-on from sustainable development, and is used to describe modes of transport, and systems of transport planning, which are consistent with wider concerns of sustainability.

Sustainable transport is fundamentally a broad spectrum movement. Whereas it started as a movement driven by environmental concerns, over these last years there has been increased emphasis on social equity and fairness issues, and in particular the need to ensure proper access and services for lower income groups and people with mobility limitations, including the fast growing population of older citizens. Many of the people exposed to the most vehicle noise, pollution and safety risk have been those who do not own, or cannot drive cars. In short, we can underscore that making cities and urban transportation systems more sustainable will be a prerequisite for poverty eradication, a "greener" economy and sustainable development.

Developing sustainable modes of transportation should be a key part of any development objective because environmental, social, health, and economic challenges are intertwined with our transit.

Rio+20 outcome noted that “transportation and mobility are central to sustainable development”, and recognized “the importance of the efficient movement of people and goods, and access to environmentally sound, safe and affordable transportation as a means to improve social equity, health, resilience of cities, urban-rural linkages and productivity of rural areas”.

Rio+20 also “recognized that partnerships among cities and communities play an important role in promoting sustainable development”. It is crucially important that in the decision making processes for a sustainable transportation policy, we need to ensure that public and private sector stakeholders coordinate their transportation planning, development and delivery activities. These transportation decisions should also be integrated with environment, health, energy and urban land-use decisions. It is equally important to make transportation-related decisions in an open and inclusive process. Sustainable transportation policies have their greatest impact at the city level. It not only makes streets safer, cleaner, and less congested, it makes residents happier, healthier, and more productive.

As the global population and globalization process expand, we need to make sure that those do not happen at the cost of our environment, our health, and city dwellers’ quality of life. In practice, we need to weigh the overall sustainability of green transport option. However, we should not forget that green vehicles are more fuel-efficient, but only in comparison with standard vehicles, and they still contribute to traffic congestion and road accidents.

The concept of “electric mobility” or simply “E-mobility” has been gaining every day more importance in a world facing the environmental catastrophe and the limitations of fossil-based fuels.

From electric rapid transit systems to individual electric vehicles, there is an increasing realization that the future of mobility could lie in electric transport. Electric mobility is certainly not a “silver bullet” that could solve all of our transport problems, but it offers many new opportunities to improve mobility in a sustainable way.

It is therefore significant that since its establishment, the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS) has been focusing on such challenges of sustainability at each of its annual conferences and other events. This Dialogue is another timely, relevant and much-needed initiative on its part. So far, the annual sessions of GFHS has been successfully held in China, the United States and Brazil for seven consecutive times. During Rio+20 summit, GFHS held very successful events focusing on the topic “Green Mobility and Sustainable Human Settlements”. It has become a high-level dialogue platform for local governments, NGOs, business sectors and academic circles, and has made great contributions to deliberations on sustainable human settlements advancing the UN-Habitat Agenda and realization of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially at local levels.

In cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other UN agencies, GFHS actively explores the new ways of combining urbanization and green economy. In April 2011 at the headquarters of the United Nations, GFHS launched the initiative of International Green Model City (IGMC) which is a creative exploration of new urbanization. GFHS engaged international experts to develop high-quality IGMC Standards and relevant indicators and benchmarks, so as to stimulate the government, private sector and all other social sectors in developing a new kind of partnership model. The IGMC pilot projects are scheduled to be implemented, to begin with, in a few developing countries including China.

During Rio+20, The IGMC principles and standards were shared with participating representatives. Those attracted attention of local government officials and experts from various parts of the world.

The Berlin High-level Dialogue will also coincide with the 2013 Global Forum on Human Settlements and Awards Ceremony. "Global Human Settlements Award" is a worldwide prize annually presented by GFHS. The awarded cities, scenic spots, enterprises, projects and individuals represent various parts of the world. The Award is especially supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA)

In his Five Year Action Plan launched last year by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, transport was identified as one of the six main building blocks for achieving sustainable development and announced his intention to "convene aviation, marine, ferry, rail, road and urban public transport providers, along with Governments and investors, to develop and take action on recommendations for more sustainable transport systems that can address rising congestion and pollution worldwide, particularly in urban areas." The Berlin High-level Dialogue will provide an important contribution to this process.

Let me reiterate that GFHS would like to work together with local governments, UN and international organizations and private sectors to implement Rio+20 decisions and to advance sustainable urbanization. GFHS also would like to join hands with other partners to contribute to the articulation of post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations.
