



Seventh Session of the  
General Assembly  
**Open Working Group on  
Sustainable Development Goals**

**Keynote Speech by  
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1. Honourable Ministers and Mayors, Excellencies and distinguished Delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,
2. I am honoured to speak here at the Seventh Session of the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Allow me to begin by thanking the Co-Chairs, His Excellency Macharia Kamau, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Kenya to the United Nations and His Excellency Csaba Kőrösi, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Hungary to the United Nations. We are grateful for the opportunity they have given us to discuss sustainable cities and human settlements.
4. In preparation for this session, UN-Habitat and UNEP led the drafting of an **Issue Brief on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements**. Twelve other United Nations entities contributed: ECLAC, ESCAP, IFAD, ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNISDR, UN-Women, WHO, WMO and the World Bank.
5. This Issue Brief consolidates a number of proposals on how to reflect urbanization in the Sustainable Development Goals. Over the past year an increasing number of organizations have taken the initiative to highlight the role of sustainable cities and human settlements in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. These include the Group of Friends of Sustainable Cities, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments, the Communitas Coalition for Sustainable Cities and Regions, the World

Urban Campaign, the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies and C-40, among others. **All point to the critical importance of the city in sustainable development.**

6. The High Level Panel also reminded us that cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost.
7. Urbanization is accelerating and it has the potential to be *the* major driver of sustainable development in the next twenty years.
8. We expect approximately three billion new dwellers to arrive in our cities and towns by 2050.
9. In contrast, it took the entire history of humanity to reach the 3.5 billion urban dwellers that we have today. Now, we expect to achieve that in fewer than 40 years.
10. With the growth of the human population from seven to nine billion and the increase in the urban proportion of this population from 50 to 70 per cent, it is going to be difficult to match the development outcomes that were achieved in the past.
11. **For most of human history, urbanization** occurred in parallel with development. Cities have been the cradle of advanced human knowledge and socio-political evolution. Both are necessary in dealing with the emerging challenges of human development. Indeed, there is a strong historical correlation between urbanization and development.
12. However, today we are observing a new process worldwide: a very high rate of **spontaneous urbanization**. The correlation between urbanization and development becomes less clear in this new rapid process, and poses difficult challenges.
13. Good urbanization does not come by chance. It comes by design. Therefore it can be good or bad, efficient or inefficient, integrated or segregated, compact or sprawling, functional or non-functional, with a strong identity or not.
14. Good urbanization requires that a set of decisions be taken in order to achieve good **urban patterns**. Indeed, as reflected in *The Future We Want*, Member States 'recognize that if they are well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies.'
15. One thing is certain. **It is impossible to imagine achieving sustainable development without harnessing the power and potential of urbanization. It is impossible to think of 'sustainability' without recognizing the distinct nature of life in cities.**

16. Indeed no country has ever reached middle-income status without proper urbanization. Many city dwellers enjoy higher levels of human development.
17. It is critical to understand that **good urbanization** is not a passive outcome of growth. Proper urbanization is the *driver* of growth. The problem that we face nowadays is that most of the new urbanization is **spontaneous and unplanned**. Therefore, it is unable to provide the positive outcomes that are needed.
18. In the last twenty years, and especially since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, we have learnt that good and productive urbanization is an outcome of a set of initiatives, which includes urban governance, urban planning and a shared vision of urbanization by a variety of stakeholders.
19. **Local governments** are at the level closest to the people. In most cases, they have the greatest accountability to those who put them in place. They have the highest incentive to deliver to their population – and to quickly face the consequences if they do not.
20. Good urbanization does not come by chance, but through dedicated **efforts** by different stakeholders. Good urbanization requires **political commitment** and also **technical capacity**.
21. However, the sustainable development agenda still has **unfinished business when it comes to urbanisation and cities. The MDGs** addressed cities in a very limited way, under an environmental rubric. Even though the lives of many slum dwellers were improved, they were overwhelmingly offset by new slum growth. With the experience of the fourteen years we realize that **focusing only on sectoral aspects of urbanization, such as slum upgrading, cannot deliver sustainable urbanization. We need more structural measures to achieve sustainable cities and human settlements.**
22. We may ask, then: **what is required** to make urbanization work for sustainable development? And can this be **achieved in practice** in different parts of the world? There are several good examples but I am limited to mentioning only a few in my remarks this morning.
23. The forms and styles of urbanization vary in every cultural context. There are approximately half a million human settlements of all sizes on earth. None is equal to any other and each deals with a set of local conditions and specificities.
24. But, underlying this extreme diversity, there is a set of common measures employed by all well-performing human settlements. These support the concept of proper urbanization as a science.

25. There are three sets of common measures. They are: first, **enabling legislation with adequate rules and regulations**; second, **better spatial planning and design**; and third, **a financial plan both to sustain the functioning of the city and to harvest economic prosperity**.
26. All three are required at every level of economic development, from the poorest city to the richest one, and should be proportionate to the implementation capacity.
27. The first set of rules and regulations are required in urbanization because urbanization is a process of social interaction in which people live together in compact areas and share common services.
28. There is a huge variety of rules and regulations worldwide, but successful human settlements share three elements.
29. The first and most clear of these is the **regulation, protection and defense of the common space** that is used by the community. That includes streets, parks and waterways.
30. **Ouagadougou** implemented a Great Urban Land Restructuring. The goal was to implement a series of planned city extensions that anticipated and guided growth before it consolidated into settlement patterns.



31. The second element is the regulation of urban development rights, in other words **buildability**. These dictate plotting requirements, where a building can be built and its size.
32. A good example can be found in **Fiji**. As with coastal cities in other Small Island Developing States, the town of Lami has undertaken community-based vulnerability and adaptation assessments. These have allowed existing settlements to take remedial protective action. They have also helped mainstream climate change into urban planning for future settlements.



33. The third element is security of tenure, backed by adequate legal registration (a cadastre) and taking into account the rights of the women and the poor.
34. One good example is the city of Medellín, which has adopted a range of legal units to underpin planning and land readjustment. These are based on the conventional cadastre, together with other appropriate units that put informal settlements on a path to formal status.
35. I would also like to mention that Medellín will bring together more than ten thousand urban stakeholders from civil society, academia, the private sector and government, national and local, at the Seventh World Urban Forum this April.



36. After rules and regulations, the second common measure is urban **design and planning**. Such planning should establish minimum densities, optimise street connectivity and social diversity. It should aspire to an urban fabric that blends housing varieties, walkable urban spaces and varied transport options. And it should help cities build resilience to climate change. Housing cannot be approached from a silo or sectoral approach. It is an integral and integrative part of the urban fabric. The mass housing projects of the 1970s and 80s have been criticized broadly as too segregating.
37. Good design and planning also has three elements.
38. The first is the design of the common space system. This includes street pattern, size and connectivity.
39. A good example is the Metrocable system and bus rapid transit that cities, including **Medellín**, have invested in with a view to connect relatively disadvantaged neighbourhoods to the rest of the city.



40. The second includes urban basic services, water, sanitation, drainage, waste systems and public transport.
41. One good example of this is **Rabat**, whose new light rail system is bridging the city's social, economic and spatial divide. The system's 39 stations aim to bring public transport to two million people living in Morocco's greater Rabat-Sale area.



42. Another good example is **Copenhagen**, whose extensive bike paths and pedestrian-friendly plazas are well known.



43. The third element comprises the built area conditions for housing and building codes and other urban activities.
44. One good example is the city of **Portland**, which joined its regional government in establishing an Urban Growth Boundary and implementing a Climate Action Plan to prepare the city against climate change impacts. Due to progressive land use codes including city infill and strong policy action, emissions decreased 15% despite a 25% growth in population.



45. The final common measure is a **financial plan**, which is essential for the sustainability of the urban setting. Urban areas require investments for their everyday functioning and management. This in turn requires local authority budgets, themselves provided through national legislation and local regulation. Proper **urbanization** is itself a **provider of financial resources**, as seen in most of urbanized China in the last twenty years.
46. Urban areas require systems of finances to manage common space. Financial systems become increasingly complex as urban systems develop.
47. **Johannesburg** took advantage of its business and retailing cluster as well as cultural attractions to promote economic development and job creation, but municipal bonds were an essential component of the financial plan.



48. The urbanization process generates economic value for itself. Once land is declared urban and there is a will to build, the value of land increases. A system of sharing this increased value is required so that urban costs can also be shared. Urbanization always generates immense fortunes, but the system does not always allow for the

sharing of costs.

49. The city of **Sao Paulo** is today on a path of transformation in order to address difficult challenges of inequality and urban decay. The city is addressing the slum upgrading programme from financial resources coming from value sharing through the public control of buildability rights.



50. Finally, cities must adopt strategies that nurture local economy. And they should promote the provision of productive employment and decent work, especially for urban youth. Only this way can the development of the city be truly sustainable. Moreover, a healthy urban economy is an efficient and highly cost-effective driver of regional and national development.
51. **Bangalore** is one of the fastest-growing cities in Asia and among the most sought-after cities in India by the computer software, telecommunications and electronics industries. It attracts high levels of talent and investment thanks to its good labour relations, investor-friendly policies, education, research institutions, and telecommunications connectivity.



52. **Ethiopia** has provided employment for five hundred thousand youth through road construction using indigenous urban technology.

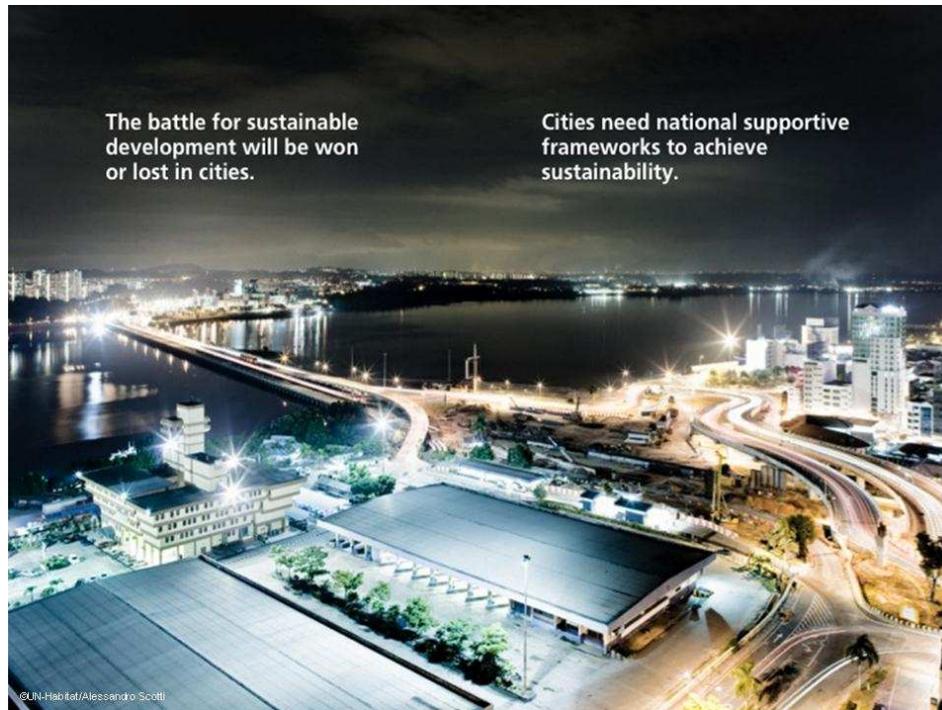


53. Lastly, it is important to build support for city legislation at the national and city-region scales, through **National Urban Policies**. Effective regulations can provide for low-carbon and equitable urban development and more resilient infrastructure. Such regulation should contain zoning and encourage mixed land use, in well-planned city extensions.
54. One excellent example is **Brazil**, which passed the “City Statute” in 2001. The City Statute provides much improved legal support to urban reform. It achieves this by promoting shared land value, democratizing access to land and housing and recognizing the right to land tenure security.



55. Another example is **Rwanda**, which has committed to developing a national urban policy. Such a policy will help Rwanda identify priorities, guide future spatial development and coordinate activities between different scales of government.





The battle for sustainable development will be won or lost in cities.

Cities need national supportive frameworks to achieve sustainability.

56. As we pursue the Post-2015 Development Agenda, a focus on cities puts space and place at the center of that agenda. By explicitly recognizing the power of urbanization we can better harness its inherent opportunities. When we guide it proactively, urbanization is **integrative, transformative and universal**.
57. An urban approach to sustainable development is **integrative** because cities are hubs of peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing. They are champions of innovation. They strengthen institutions and build capacities. Urban public space is particularly instrumental. It allows people to live amidst complexity, assert their identities and access resources formally and informally. Cities are the arenas where economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies can be created.
58. An urban approach is also **transformative**. Cities are where people and institutions are concentrated and action is concretized. The proximity that cities foster among firms and people is supported by a mixed land-use pattern. Through proper planning, cities can be developed at the human scale. This must be supported by integrating public transport with safe and comfortable non-motorised transport, mainly walking and cycling. Working at this scale can minimize transport and the time and costs of service delivery, while promoting economic efficiency and social inclusion.
59. Lastly, as homes for a majority of the world's people, cities are **universal**. There are significant and diverse sustainable urban development challenges and opportunities in all major regions of the

world. By 2050, nearly 70 per cent of the world's population will live in urban areas.

60. **To conclude**, I look forward to a productive debate on the critical role of well- planned cities and human settlements for sustainable development.
61. In whichever way cities are reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals, they will need the help of Member States. They will need your help to better interlink their sectors. To improve participation of women and the poor. And to embrace a new model of urbanization based on shared land value, the equitable delivery of services and greater resource efficiency.
62. **When guided proactively, the transformative power of urbanization can catalyze sustainable development.** The urban future is in your hands. I wish you success in your deliberations.