



UN-HABITAT

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**Statement by
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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

UN-HABITAT has listened carefully to Governments' contributions at the CSD-16. Key issues and suggestions emerging from the Secretary General's report and from the distinguished delegates at the CSD-16 will guide us in our work and assist Member States during the next two years of CSD-16 policy formulation and development.

We at UN-HABITAT subscribe entirely to the statement in the Secretary General's report on Land which notes that "*challenges that need to be addressed for sustainable and efficient land management include: providing secure land rights, strengthening capacities of communities, adapting land use planning technologies, and improving the provisioning of data*".

In response to increase urbanization, population growth and migration pressures, I can report that sustainable urban development, particularly as related to land and housing, is at the core of our Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan, 2008-2013. This means that, within its mandate, UN-HABITAT will continue to work with member states and its partners to support sustainable development endeavors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to share with you some of our experiences and views on the nexus between sustainable development and both land and urbanization. I will also draw from facts that we are all familiar with to illustrate the point.

My first message is: **there can be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanization.**

My second message, following from the above is: **there can be no sustainable development and indeed sustainable urbanization without sustainable land management**, with particular emphasis on the benefits for securing land rights for all.

Let's start with the first message. We view sustainability as a forward-orientated concept. In that respect, we all know that more people worldwide now live in urban centres than ever before and that the trend is set to continue. In fact by 2050 about two thirds of the world's population will be living in cities. More importantly, developing regions are experiencing the fastest urbanization and population growth rates. For instance, by 2040, at least 50% of people will be living in cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to the current 39%. It is commonly recognized that in many developing cities, slum-like settlements are absorbing most of the population growth. Two key questions need to be asked: are these trends sustainable? how can these challenges be turned into opportunities? Clearly, we cannot longer afford to ignore urbanization trends.

It is this context that I am pleased to note that the Secretary General's report recognizes that urbanization is both a challenge and an opportunity. The report notes that:

"It is a challenge in that providing additional billions of people with adequate housing, water and sanitation, employment and other needs will require vast investment, skilled management and strong leadership. In addition, the concentration of people in cities increases the risks of disease, pollution and disaster. On the other hand, the concentration of people will also facilitate the provision of education, health care, transportation and other social services, as well as productive employment. Urbanization also tends to conserve energy and natural resources inasmuch as people living in densely populated cities use substantially less land, energy and water per person than people with comparable incomes in suburban or rural areas".

Clearly urbanization is one of the most important cross-cutting issues on the sustainable development agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My second message was that there can be no sustainable development, and indeed sustainable urbanization without sustainable land management.

We all know that access to land is essential for human shelter, food production and other economic activities, both by businesses and natural resource users. More importantly, we have learnt at UN-HABITAT that securing rights to land and property encourages people to invest in improving both dwellings and the land itself. They can also enable people to access public services and sources of credit.

In order to do these things it is UN-HABITAT's view that is important to shift our strategic focus from land ownership to security of tenure. Forced eviction, which is increasingly sharply, is a dramatic consequence of insecurity of tenure. Evictions not only cause personal suffering, destroy livelihoods and investments, but also reduce available housing stocks just when they need to increase dramatically. We also know that when evictions occur, the poor, weak, women and children and other vulnerable groups suffer the most. Eviction often leads to the creation of new un-authorized settlements elsewhere, only moving the problem from one location to another at great social, economic, environmental, and occasionally political cost. We at UN-HABITAT believe that alternative solutions to forced evictions should be promoted. We can assist governments to provide these alternatives.

We also know that in cities, peri-urban and rural areas, insecure tenure and informal settlements combine with other factors – unplanned, congested development, safety concerns and social vulnerability – to reduce public revenues, infrastructure investment, employment and economic growth. We therefore believe that sustainable development cannot take place in a context where the bulk of human settlements are unplanned and populations are exposed to hazardous, unsanitary and insecure living conditions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UN-HABITAT is committed to the sustainable development agenda and the CSD process. We are pleased to report that we organized events and expert group meetings on land for sustainable urbanization to highlight the central role rapid urbanization is playing and will continue to play in the sustainable development debate.

At UN-HABITAT, we are documenting a range of land and property rights can also facilitate other rights and opportunities. These include the right to political participation, access to basic services and to credit. We are pleased to report that there is an increasing worldwide convergence of views that individual titling alone is not delivering security of tenure for all. Governments are therefore encouraged to investigate a menu of options to document land rights in their respective countries, including drawing lessons from *de facto* rights. We now know that no single form of tenure can meet the different needs of all social groups. It is clear that a range of land tenure options can enable both women and men from all social groups to meet their changing needs over time. Legal recognition for different forms of tenure can also strengthen the development of dynamic land markets in highly populated areas. UN-HABITAT's recent publication on "Secure Land Rights for All" launched here at CSD explores a range of experiences and practices useful for policy-makers to make secure land rights for all a reality in their respective countries.

A number of governments have, to varying degrees, recognised a range of land rights including customary rights as legitimate. Also, some functional alternative systems to document land rights and transactions have emerged. Still, most governments continue to grapple with conflicting sets of tenure rules (and relevant institutions), particularly in Africa and Asia. These tensions can be exacerbated by multiple layers of legislation and fragmented institutional responsibilities for land allocation which leads to widespread uncertainty, insecurity and disputes, consequently inhibiting investment in land development and to reduced prospects for sustainable urbanisation.

I thank you for your kind attention