

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON WORLD HABITAT DAY

5 October 2009

The theme of this year's observance of World Habitat Day, *Planning our Urban Future*, is meant to underscore the urgency of meeting the needs of city dwellers in a rapidly urbanizing world.

The major urban challenges of the twenty-first century include the rapid growth of many cities and the decline of others, the expansion of the informal sector, and the role of cities in causing or mitigating climate change. Evidence from around the world suggests that governments at all levels are largely failing to address these challenges. Urban sprawl and unplanned development are among the most visible consequences. Hundreds of millions of urban dwellers are also increasingly vulnerable to rising sea levels, coastal flooding and other climate-related hazards.

A troubling trend has emerged in many cities in developed and developing countries alike: the growth of up-market suburban areas and gated communities, on the one hand, and the simultaneous increase in overcrowded tenement zones, ethnic enclaves, slums and informal settlements, on the other. Stark contrasts have also emerged between technologically advanced and well-serviced business sectors, and other areas defined by declining industry, sweatshops and informal businesses.

Better, more equitable urban planning is essential. New ideas from smart cities around the world are pointing the way toward sustainable urbanization. But there is far more to do. Urban poor need improved tenure and access to land. All cities need safer and more environmentally friendly public transport, housing security, clinics and public services. There is also a need to mobilize financing for urban development.

Planning is at the heart of this agenda. But planning will work only where there is good urban governance and where the urban poor are brought into the decisions that affect their lives. And planning will work best only where corruption is honestly tackled. United Nations bodies such as UN-HABITAT can provide vital help with capacity building, research, and knowledge management and exchange.

At the dawn of this new urban age, we recognize the problems and we know how to tackle them. We understand perhaps more clearly than ever before that no-one can be excluded, especially the poor. On World Habitat Day, let us pledge to do our part to follow through on our plans for a better, greener, more sustainable future for our increasingly urban planet.