



Statement of the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka on the occasion of World Habitat Day, Monday 6 October 2008.

Today we mark World Habitat Day at a time the majority of the world's people are living in towns and cities. And the process is accelerating. This transformation has a direct bearing on the strategies we must adopt to attain the Millennium Development Goals.

The other historic turning point is that the number of urban slum dwellers around the world is moving above the 1 billion mark, making it clear that the urbanisation of poverty is arguably one of the biggest development challenges.

This is why we chose the theme, *Harmonious Cities* for World Habitat Day 2008. We need to raise awareness about the problems of rapid urbanization, its impact on the environment and the consequences and challenges of rising urban poverty.

No longer can we ignore the plight of slum dwellers who live in life-threatening conditions. Nor can we hide from the fact that urban poverty and urban inequalities are rising around the world, in developed and developing countries alike. We have both a moral and ethical responsibility to make our cities more harmonious by making them more inclusive. It is a societal imperative that we fight urban poverty and squalor if we are to secure urban safety and security.

Our experience working with governments, local authorities, communities and the private sector around the world gives us some good insights to meeting these challenges. Even if we do not have all the answers it enables us to ask some of the right questions.

It is also no coincidence that climate change is now emerging at the forefront of international debate at the same time, and virtually at the same pace, as the world becomes urbanized. Cities consume upwards of 75 percent of all energy and contribute to an equally substantial amount of green house gas emissions. Cities must therefore be an integral part of any mitigation efforts.

Reducing the contribution of cities to climate change and the vulnerability of cities to the effects of climate change must be viewed as a historical opportunity to improve the living conditions of all women and men, including the most vulnerable segments of our urban populations. Both adaptation and mitigation efforts require improved land use planning, more robust infrastructure and smarter construction. I can think of no better initiative than to combine these efforts to make our cities and towns greener and safer and more equitable. My message to you today is that the challenges of climate change and urban poverty are inextricably linked, they both depend on making our cities more harmonious.