

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

MESSAGE ON World Habitat Day
6 October 2008

Many of the world's most pressing challenges – poverty, natural disasters, escalating prices for food and fuel – have important links with rapid urbanization.

Urbanization changes forever the way we use land, water and energy. Done well, it can bring people choices and help them thrive. Done poorly, it reduces safety, despoils the environment and exacerbates the marginalization of those who are already suffering and excluded.

The theme of this year's World Habitat Day is "*harmonious cities*". Our rapidly urbanizing world cannot claim to be harmonious if slum-dwellers do not enjoy opportunities to find jobs and improve their living conditions. Nor will it be harmonious if the growth and expansion of urban areas comes at the expense of the natural environment.

The Millennium Development Goals call for a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. As of 2005, slightly more than one third of the urban population in developing regions lived in slum conditions. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion was over 60 percent, meaning that large investments will be necessary, for example to provide access to water, sanitation, durable housing or sufficient living space. But even in that region, and in others where deprivation is not as acute, simple, low-cost interventions could go a long way.

Cities have tremendous potential to be places where balanced development prevails, where diverse people live in harmony, and where healthy living conditions coexist with low levels of energy consumption, resource-use and waste. As we observe World Habitat Day, I call on all partners and stakeholders to do our utmost to realize this potential, and to build decent living conditions for all women, men and children in a way that also preserves our natural heritage and promotes greener and smarter growth.