



World Habitat Day 2014
Message of the UN-Habitat Executive Director
Dr. Joan Clos

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Voices from Slums

Every year on the first Monday of October we reflect on the state of our human settlements and what we want the cities of our future to look like.

This year, the United Nations has chosen to turn the spotlight on the people who live or have lived in informal settlements, listening to “*Voices from Slums*”.

The goal is to raise awareness of life conditions in some areas of the planet which are crowded, with inadequate housing, poor or no water and sanitation facilities and no security of tenure. There is rarely any public space in these areas and no allocation for streets, meaning no public transport and no access for emergency services.

As part of the Millennium Development Goals, the world pledged to improve the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. By 2010 we had achieved this by more than 2 fold. However, with growing urbanisation, the number of people being born in or moving into these areas is also increasing and the overall number of people living in slums continues to rise. Estimates claim that there are already one billion people living in slums.

People in slums are also disproportionately affected by climate change, with houses often built precariously on slopes or unsuitable building space and with inadequate materials making them vulnerable to landslides, floods and earthquakes.

Great efforts are being made to improve many slums around the world and better the lives of those that live there. But slums are a manifestation of rapid unchecked urbanisation – a result of allowing our cities to expand without design or regulation and with disregard to their citizens. While continuing to upgrade the slums we have, we urgently need to focus our efforts on robust urban planning and the provision of safe, affordable housing that is appropriate and adequate for our citizens’ growing needs.

Through real stories it is possible to demonstrate to decision makers in the urban arena that slum upgrading programmes can achieve better life conditions for slum dwellers, and greater economic and social impacts.

In 2016, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development - Habitat III will set us on the path for a new urban agenda. But we cannot wait until then to stop the spread of slums. Our urban citizens have the right to adequate housing and basic services and we need to make sure that our cities and towns are planned appropriately to provide these.

Nearly one billion urban slum dwellers are counting on it. We should hear their voices.