

8th World Congress of Metropolis

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Berlin, 11-15 May 05

Opening Session

Remarks as delivered

It gives me great pleasure to join you, here, in this historic city of Berlin, on the occasion of the 8th Session of the World Congress of Metropolis - one of the major international organisations of local authorities that have been engaged in a growing partnership with the United Nations, and UN-HABITAT in particular.

I am very grateful for the excellent collaboration with my friend, Mayor Clos of Barcelona, in his capacity both as the President of Metropolis and as the Chairman of the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA).

I should also like to thank Mayor Klaus Wowereit and the city of Berlin for hosting this important event, which is devoted to the very relevant theme of: "tradition and transformation - the future of the city".

Indeed, the future of the city reflects the future of the world itself, which will be, no doubt, characterised by the urbanisation of the planet. This has been a long-term historical trend but now reaching to a point where the Earth itself begins to resemble to a "city", not only because of the socio-economic dimension of globalisation, but also given the impact of the technologies of information on our lives.

World as city - city as future, the urban renaissance is actually both a joyful, but a challenging trend as well. In my capacity as the Executive Director of the United Nations Agency responsible for cities and local governments, I consider myself a privileged witness of a changing world, where cities and their leaders have made a decisive breakthrough towards the international recognition of the local dimension of development. This is a very encouraging trend.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Urban issues, particularly those related to urban poverty, are arguably the fastest growing sector in the development cooperation portfolio. As you are aware, the UN system was conceived at a point in history when the problems of cities - apart from their reconstruction after World War II - were barely on the horizon.

For nearly thirty years since the Vancouver Habitat conference in 1976, UN-HABITAT struggled almost alone to assist Member States in dealing with the impacts of a global urbanization that has accelerated enormously from about 1950. Since the Istanbul City Summit in 1996, however, there has been a global realization that we are destined to become an "urban species" and that our policies at all levels need to catch up with this growing reality.

Since the beginning of the new Millennium, cities have moved to the forefront of socio-economic change and sustainable development. At UN-HABITAT, we know that half of the world's population is now living in cities and urban settlements, while the other half is increasingly dependent on cities and towns for their economic survival and livelihood.

Metropolitan cities have become centres of innovation and engines of development. It is now generally understood that cities are the key to social and economic advancement and environmental improvement.

Over the last decade, the role of local government as catalyst for development and community leadership has also evolved, with a strong emphasis on partnership with business and civil society. Local government's relationship with the UN has also developed in a positive way. On the occasion of the 20th Session of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT held in Nairobi from 4 – 8 April this year local authorities were able – on the basis of rule 64 of the Governing Council – to participate in a formal intergovernmental dialogue with representatives of national governments. I am glad with this positive development.

However such an encouraging trend should not divert our attention from the real challenges of the transformation of our cities.

We are also currently witnessing in cities massive breaches of human rights, and ecological and other natural disasters in addition to growing social inequality. A large part of the world's urban

population lives without access to even the most basic services. In contrast to their promise, many cities - especially metropolitan cities in the developing world - represent today the most alarming concentrations of poverty.

We must recognise that the pace of urbanisation is simply too fast to manage. It is estimated that there are about one billion urban dwellers living without adequate shelter and basic services; what is worse most of them live in life-threatening conditions of deprivation and environmental degradation. This number is expected to double by 2025. Thus, the global trend in urbanisation implies nothing less than the "urbanisation of poverty and deprivation". Unemployment with weak social services, lack of adequate shelter and basic infrastructure combined with increasing disparities are resulting in a high degree of social exclusion leading to overall social dysfunction, crime and violence.

Honourable Mayors,

You are managing the biggest cities of this planet and you are well aware of the power of the new technologies of information - the power of the media, which is one the best examples of the transformation of our society. The focus of this congress, which is on the "future of the city", illustrates not only the importance that you are concealing to progress, but also your desire to see progress based on tradition. One of the dimensions of tradition in the part of the world, where I am from, in Africa, is reflected in the values of solidarity and compassion.

I am therefore here to ask you, as I have done on several occasions in the past, not to forget the needs and expectations of the disadvantaged populations, the one billion people who are living in the slums and who represent one third of the urban population of the planet. These men, women and children have practically no access to basic services such as water, electricity and telephone. Of course, they have no access to the Internet. The Society of information ignores them and this is what we must – I mean what you must also improve in the management of the city of tomorrow.

We must also promote sustainable urbanization by taking preventive measures to discourage unsustainable urbanization patterns in the future. We must develop effective adaptive strategies,

programmes, policies and concrete projects to deal with reality in the present cities. One of the best ways of ensuring a successful delivery on these goals is to promote good metropolitan governance, which no doubt has the potential to contribute simultaneously to preventive and adaptive measures in favour of sustainable urbanization. We also need to focus on policies that build capacity in governance.

It is encouraging to note that over the past decade, many cities have made enormous efforts in making their governance systems more open with the view of enhancing equity and effectiveness alike. This is a major achievement for local authorities and communities worldwide. Several members of Metropolis who are present here have developed innovative governance mechanisms that attempt to make their cities more inclusive and productive at the same time. A quick look at the websites of your respective cities and organizations reveals encouraging best practices, which should be shared with your sister-cities in the developing world, in the established context of "city-to-cooperation".

Distinguished delegates,

We, at UN-HABITAT, feel that still more can be done to integrate the needs of the urban poor into metropolitan policymaking and to advance the cause of sustainable urbanisation with a clear pro-poor focus. We should forge partnerships with the urban poor and empowering them to solve their own problems. International meetings such as this congress should endorse and popularise the principle of fighting urban poverty without fighting the poor. Particular emphasis should also be placed on facilitating the access of women to decision-making and to urban services so that they will be able to find the recognition they deserve.

Excellency

Distinguished participants,

The future of the city is the city itself. But, our cities must be built on "inclusive" and "intercultural values", which reflect our diversity in the unity.

This is the core message, which I would like to convey to you today.

I thank you for your attention.