



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. MR. ESALA TELENI, AMBASSADOR, FIJI EMBASSY TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SYMPOSIUM ON SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION (Yangzhou, China, 16 December 2013)

Mr. Xie Zhengyi, Party Secretary of Yangzhou Municipal CPC Committee,
Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Secretary-General of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing Countries, United Nations,
Her Excellency, Ms. Irene Giner-Reichl, Ambassador of Austria to the People's Republic of China,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At the outset, allow me to express my sincere thanks to the organisers for inviting me to speak at the plenary session of this high-level symposium on sustainable cities and sustainable urbanisation. I am honour to participate in this forum amongst high-level officials of the United Nations, senior diplomats, distinguished experts, urban planners, mayors and other decision-makers from around the world. I also wish to thank the Municipal Government and the people of Yangzhou for their friendship and hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival to your beautiful city.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. In the context of the United Nations development agenda, this high-level symposium is a timely event that provides a platform for frank and open discussion on the challenges, lessons learned and success stories of sustainable cities and urbanisation. The outcome of our discussions over the next three days will be an important input for the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the work of the newly established High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, as well as in the overall elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.

3. The sixth session of the Open Working Group concluded its deliberations at the UN Headquarters in New York last week. With two more sessions to follow in January and February next year, the inter-governmental process of negotiating a set of SDGs will begin thereafter with the aim of submitting a report to the 69th session of the General Assembly in September 2014. In accordance with the criteria agreed in the Rio+20 Summit, these SDGs must be "global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities".

4. As we look towards a transformative global development agenda beyond 2015, it is important to reflect on the fact that some 70 per cent of the world's population will live in cities by 2050, with rural-urban drift occurring largely in developing countries, seriously compounding their urban development challenges. The grim reality of approximately one billion people living in urban slums highlights the gravity of the challenges. Poor people living in slum houses in an unhealthy environment, which co-exist with modern high-rise buildings in many developing countries, is a stark contrast that depicts poverty and inequality - two important issues that should have priority in the post-2015 development agenda.

5. Our political leaders have reaffirmed at the 2012Rio+20 Summit the need to accord the highest priority to poverty eradication within the United Nations development agenda, addressing the root causes and challenges of poverty through integrated, coordinated and coherent strategies at all levels. Specifically, world leaders recognised the importance of sustainable cities and sustainable development as essential to poverty eradication and to a sustainable future. The Group of 77 and China holds the view that cities, if planned and developed through a holistic approach, one that integrates proper planning and management, can promote all the three dimensions of sustainable development resulting in the creation of sustainable cities and urbanisation.

6. The Group of 77 and China also believes that policies and development efforts targeted at poverty eradication must be responsive to the challenges as well as opportunities of sustainable development at both international and national levels. In the context of sustainable cities and urbanisation, it is important that all United Nations system organisations, including the international community, financial institutions, UN-Habitat agenda partners and all relevant stakeholders play a constructive role in assisting developing countries to address the multiple challenges facing cities. It is imperative that adequate resources are mobilised and allocated for the attainment of development goals such as those highlighted in the Habitat Agenda, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation relevant to human settlements, as well as relevant commitments contained in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled 'the future we want'.

7. We note that while significant efforts and progress have been made in implementing the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlement and the Habitat Agenda, challenges remain, such as, inter alia, the rapid urbanisation process in large parts of the developing world. The continuing increase in the number of urban slum dwellers and the negative impact of environmental degradation on human settlements remain pressing challenges for urban planners. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China encourages Governments and Habitat agenda partners to use planned city extension methodologies to guide the sustainable development of cities experiencing rapid urban growth, in order to prevent slum proliferation, enhance access to basic urban services, support inclusive housing, enhance job opportunities and create a safe and healthy living environment for all city dwellers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. The Group of 77 and China is proud to play an instrumental role in the recent United Nations' decision to proclaim 31 October of every year, beginning in 2014, as World Cities Day. The proclamation of the World Cities Day and its subsequent observance and celebration will no doubt raise global awareness on the importance of sustainable cities and sustainable urbanisation. We also welcome the offer by the Government of Ecuador, one of our member states, to host the UN-Habitat III conference in Quito in 2016.

9. Lastly, we invite all countries, UN-Habitat agenda partners and all other relevant players in urban development to consult and work collectively in an open and participatory manner, to formulate and implement sustainable urban development policies that promote just, resilient and inclusive cities. Such a process should take into consideration the contributions of all relevant stakeholders, and with a particular focus on the needs of women and those who are most vulnerable, including, inter alia, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities.

10. It is our sincere belief that better cities will support and sustain a safe and healthy living environment for all. I look forward to the deliberations over the next few days and wish the symposium a great success!

Xie Xie! (thank you).

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