



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DUMISANI KUMALO, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, BEFORE THE SECOND COMMITTEE ON AGENDA ITEM 54: HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (New York, 26 October 2006)

Madam Chair

The Group of 77 and China wishes to thank the Secretary General for his report on Human Settlements. We also wish to congratulate Mrs. Tibaijuka upon her re-election. We assure her of the Group's support and cooperation. We are supportive of the Programme on UN Habitat.

You may recall that the decision to upgrade the status of UN-HABITAT was sponsored by the Group of 77 and China and we commend the progress made in the first 4 years of UN-HABITAT in its new capacity as a fully fledged Programme. The visibility of both the issues and the agency has increased. Challenges to sustainable urbanisation are of great concern and relevance, particularly to the developing world. According to reliable reports, over 1 billion people are without adequate shelter and their numbers are projected to increase.

We have noted with satisfaction the active role being played by UN-HABITAT in assisting Member States to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially Target 10 on water and sanitation and Target 11 on slum upgrading. In this regard, we urge our development partners to give UN-HABITAT the financial and technical support required due to the growing demands for assistance at both national and regional levels. This Programme plays an important role towards achieving sustainable development. Unfortunately the resources dispensed to the Programme are disproportionate to its task.

Madam Chair

The United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation established in 1974 to mobilize finance and investment for human settlements activities has never been adequately capitalized. The Group of 77 however, recognizes that the resource mobilization strategy of UN-HABITAT has resulted in a steady increase in resources over the past five years. Despite this, the continued inadequacy and unpredictability of funding to the Foundation that is attributed to the imbalance between earmarked contributions as well as dependency on a small number of donors, lessens the ability of the Programme to function as expected.

The Group of 77 and China commends countries that have responded to the fundraising efforts of the Executive Director. However, for the implementation of the Programme to be efficient and effective, there is still a need for the international community to consider increasing their voluntary non-earmarked contributions to the Foundation, preferably on a multi-year basis. We also call upon the international donor community and financial institutions to support the Water and Sanitation Trust Fund and the Slum Upgrading Facility for the UN-HABITAT.

In order to revitalize the Foundation, the Group of 77 and China requests the Secretary-General to consider increasing the regular budget of UN-HABITAT. We note the promulgation of the financial rules and regulations of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation as a special annex to the United Nations Financial rules. This may help the Programme to mobilize resources needed for fulfilling its mandate.

Madam Chair

The work programme for the biennium, as approved by the 20th session of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT, focuses on the Millennium Development Goals, particularly on Goal 7, targets 10 and 11 that are aimed at reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by the year 2015. It also aims to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. We need to address water and sanitation along with slum upgrading targets in an integrated manner, particularly at the implementation level. This holistic approach was also called for by the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development that further stressed the strategic links between sustainable human settlements and sources of energy, one of the central themes of the Commission at its fourteenth and fifteenth sessions.

Madam Chair

The Group of 77 and China underscores the importance of UN-HABITAT's regional consultative forums, for instance

those involving Ministers of Housing and Urban Development. These fora provide opportunities for sharing knowledge, experience and best practices. We therefore call upon UN-HABITAT to promote these fora and, where possible, to support developing countries, especially those countries that have insufficient financial, human and technical resources.

Madam chair

Disasters, be they natural or human induced, considerably reduce the gains made in the area of human settlements. Whenever they occur, they cause loss of life, destruction of property and human suffering. Due to the invaluable experiences of UN-HABITAT in preparedness and recovery measures, particularly in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, or Liberia, the Group of 77 and China is in favour of more involvement of UN-HABITAT in the activities of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for Disaster and Humanitarian Affairs.

Furthermore, to mitigate the impacts of disasters, the Group urges the international donor community to assist governments with the requisite financial resources and technical expertise in establishing early warning systems.

Madam Chair

We are pleased to note the progress made in raising awareness of the slum challenge at the highest levels of Government. In that context, a special session of the African Ministers Conference on Housing and Urban Development was held in Nairobi in April this year. This high-level meeting was entirely devoted to the slum upgrading target of the Millennium Development Goals. A similar high-level meeting for Asian Ministers will be held in New Delhi in December this year. Together with the long standing Ministers meeting on Housing and Urban Development for Latin America and the Caribbean, these meetings have provided strong impetus for elevating the urbanisation and the urban poverty agenda in the development agenda of our respective Member States. The Group of 77 and China welcomes these efforts and invites the attention of the international community to the outcomes of such initiatives.

The Group of 77 and China would like to emphasize that, during the ongoing reform process within the United Nations, programmes like UN-Habitat, which have a clear and unique mandate, should not be sacrificed or diluted. Instead such pro-poor programmes, which are so intricately linked to sustainable development in a rapidly globalizing world, should be bolstered and strengthened, with access to more core predictable funding for their important work, including at country level.

I thank you.