



UN-HABITAT

Remarks by Mrs. Anna Tibajuka,
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Executive Director UN-HABITAT

On the occasion of the 12th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the to the UN
Framework Convention on Climate Change
High-Level Segment
Wednesday 15 November

Your Excellency, President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya,
Your Excellency, President Moritz Leuenberger of Switzerland,
Your Excellency, Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations,
Chairman Kibutha Kibwana of the Conference of the Parties and Honourable Ministers,
The Executive Secretary of the Climate Change Secretariat Yvo de Boer,
Distinguished Heads of UN Delegations,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues of the United Nations system,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address you at this important juncture in your deliberations. I know it has been a roller coaster ride with many ups and downs, as some of you have so aptly stated. I know that the measure of success here will be what gets decided for Africa, and for the developing countries as whole.

Success here is critical in our planet's new urban age. Today half of humanity lives in cities. It is projected that by 2030 that figure will rise to two-thirds. We live in an age of unprecedented, rapid, irreversible urbanisation. The cities growing fastest are those of the developing world, and the fastest growing neighbourhoods are the slums.

A great achievement is your decision to establish a so-called Adaptation Fund specially intended to help developing countries shore up their defences against disasters, many of them, like floods, or droughts, brought on by climate change. I congratulate you for way you have determined the purpose and management of this Fund. They are the necessary first steps. This is a great accomplishment indeed.

For UN-HABITAT, the agency that deals with the built environment, with cities, towns and villages, we are most keen that the new Fund will help them adapt to climate change at the local level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, the impact of climate change takes place in cities, towns and villages. As our climate changes things are getting worse, threatening more extreme weather. If sea levels rise by just one metre, many major coastal cities will be under threat: Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Los Angeles, New York, Lagos, and Cairo Karachi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Shanghai, Osaka-Kobe, and Tokyo. To cite just some, those are mega cities with populations of more than 10 million. Never mind the many more smaller cities and island nations.

UN figures show that this year alone, 117 million people around the world have suffered from some 300 natural disasters, including devastating droughts in China and Africa, and massive flooding in Asia and Africa, costing nearly \$15 billion in damages. One example – New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Everywhere the urban poor live in places no-one else would dare set foot – along beaches vulnerable to flooding, by railway, on slopes prone to landslides, near polluted grounds. They scratch out a living in shabby structures that would be flattened the instant a hurricane hit causing untold loss in lives and destruction.

In this new urban age, the mega-cities therefore loom as giant potential flood and disaster traps. In sub-Saharan Africa, slum dwellers constitute over 70 percent of the urban populations. In other parts of the developing world that figure is a shocking 50 percent. In this very city where you are meeting, drought refugees are migrating from the countryside to join the growing slum population.

Our partners, including African Mayors and Local Authority organizations, are deeply concerned that Africa, responsible only for 3.6 percent of global emissions, is thus extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. They have sought direct access to global climate funds.

The developing world needs local funding and local solutions to this global crisis.

Honourable Ministers,

In this new age, I implore you therefore to drive the political will for national change for local benefit.

Reduce urban poverty and we will directly offset the horrors of disasters brought on by climate change. The United Nations has calculated that one dollar invested in disaster reduction and adaptation to climate change today, can save up to seven dollars tomorrow in relief and rehabilitation costs.

Let's make the dawn of the new urban age a bright one for our beautiful blue planet. We must have local solutions and local funding to offset global disasters.

In this UN-HABITAT, with its extensive habitat agenda partners working at local level stands ready to assist you to deal with this common threat to our existence. We are the agency that works at local level to deliver global goals.

I thank you for your attention.