

United States Statement for Habitat III

Delivered by Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julián Castro

Thank you, and good morning. Mr. Secretary-General, your excellencies, esteemed mayors and ministers, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen — I am Julián Castro, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and I'm honored to be with you today.

Let me begin by congratulating the Secretary-General of the Habitat III Conference, as well as the Co-Chairs of the Preparatory Committee, and the Chair of the UN Advisory Committee on Local Authorities for their great work to create and achieve consensus on a New Urban Agenda.

Thanks to the leadership of my fellow ministers, including my Committee co-chair U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, to the insight of public servants around the world, and to the courage and creativity of the many delegates who dedicated themselves so tirelessly to the work of Habitat III

We have established a new vision that is equal to the challenges faced by our rapidly urbanizing world. It's a vision that will allow us to advance progress on a number of recent landmark accords, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the Action Agenda on financing for development forged last year in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Now, we must implement it.

In this Century of Cities — when urban centers are now home to more than half of all the people on earth, and when by 2050, nearly 70 percent of the world's people will live in cities — the New Urban Agenda will help us rethink how we build, manage, and live in urban communities.

It will help countries like Nigeria, China, Indonesia, India, the United States, and all nations where cities are growing at a breathtaking pace to address the inevitable stresses

that rapid urbanization places on housing, schools, transportation networks, and local environments.

The population of Lagos, as just one example, is expected to double from its current 18 million people by 2050. That's more people than live in all of Ecuador. Lagos is having to rethink its urban geography — reshaping how the city provides energy, water, and transportation to all its residents. And Lagos is not alone. American cities as varied as Austin, Texas, San Francisco, California, and Salt Lake City, Utah are working to make their growing cities more livable too. Here in Latin America, the world's most urbanized region, governments are confronting these challenges, while also harnessing the innovation that's taking place in São Paulo, in Mexico City, and right here in Quito to connect citizens to better health care, grocery stores and other retail, and telecommunications services.

The New Urban Agenda will help leaders and communities on every continent confront the challenges of urbanization while answering what are among the most important questions of our age:

How can we best enhance economic opportunity and quality of life in our urban centers?

How do we turn the challenges of globalization and rapid urbanization into opportunities?

And how do we develop in a way that creates prosperity for all?

Answering these questions begins with renewing our commitment to collaboration because our future lies not in competition but in cooperation. That's the central message from the New Urban Agenda. Forging a future of possibility and hope in this Century of Cities will require partnership, understanding, and respect for the humanity and common dignity of us all. And I'd like to offer three thoughts on what cities must do to create those partnerships of promise in this 21st Century.

First, cities must invest in shared prosperity and actively work to dismantle entrenched inequality. Because as much as cities matter, it is the people who make cities their home who must be at the heart of all our policies. So cities need to invest in high quality education, especially early childhood education. Brainpower is the key to creating a dynamic, agile workforce, and that opportunity has to start early in life. Cities need to create and promote pathways to jobs for low-income youth through summer job initiatives and internships.

Cities need to invest in public infrastructure. That means making smart investments in ports, airports, roads, and waterways. It means giving all households access to world-class broadband. It means ensuring that public transit is safe, reliable, and accessible to people with the lowest incomes and at all levels of physical ability. And it means creating smart electrical grids that can power the globe's green energy future.

Cities also need to invest in affordable housing and they need to ensure that no matter what neighborhood a child calls "home," that he or she can take advantage of all their city has to offer.

The second key to success is to embrace comprehensive, integrated regional planning. Cities must strengthen their connection to surrounding communities — urban, suburban, and rural. And let me give you an example why that's so critical. As city populations continue to swell, so too will the demand for food, putting even greater pressure on agricultural systems and natural resources. By focusing on how communities are connected and then strengthening those ties, we'll be better able to expand the progress we've already made to tackle poverty, hunger, and malnutrition in a number of nations, including Guatemala, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh, while also making communities more resilient to climate change.

In the United States, the Obama Administration is leading a transformation in how local communities make planning decisions. As a result, suburbs are now more strongly connected than ever to their neighboring cities' downtowns, helping to create vibrant

urban cores that can boost the entire region's economy. Cities are expanding light rail and other transit so that it connects with suburban and suburbanizing communities. Rural communities are taking the lead in bringing healthy food options to more families, especially in urban neighborhoods that have long gone without adequate grocery stores.

And I'm pleased to say that President Obama's approach puts an emphasis on measuring the results of our work, which is critical. As I learned when I was Mayor in San Antonio, Texas, and as I've seen time and again as America's Housing and Urban Development Secretary, you can't manage what you don't measure. And the New Urban Agenda has evaluation built in to track our progress. We want to know what works, what doesn't, and how we can take our successes and apply them in different contexts — not just in one city, but for cities all across the globe.

This isn't just about tracking progress though — it's about making the best use of data to inform decision-making, to drive innovation, to ensure accountability, and expand access to finance where investments are needed most. As Hurricane Matthew drove home to so many of us, the effects of climate change are felt strongest at the local level.

Last month, 17 nations committed to improve how communities use data to make themselves more resilient to climate change. And we encourage cities and organizations to follow the lead of Buenos Aires and the Latin American foundation GeoCensos in supporting the Joint Declaration on Harnessing the Data Revolution for Climate Resilience.

Finally, the third step communities must take to succeed in this Century of Cities is to foster greater openness and freedom. People everywhere yearn to be free. That hunger for freedom is as basic as the needs for shelter, work, and education. So while we invest in housing, infrastructure, and schools let's also focus on how we make our communities safer, how we counter violent extremism while at the same time celebrating our diversity. Let's protect the rights of criminal defendants and ensure that every person can get fair legal representation regardless of how much money they have.

Let's continue the progress we've seen around the world in the long march for full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, especially because LGBT individuals are often at the greatest risk of homelessness or becoming the victims of hate crimes. And let's promote the advancement of women's rights recognizing that gender equality is an integral part of a just, secure, and democratic society.

As the great South African statesman Nelson Mandela once said, "To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." What's more, free and open societies are the societies best equipped to promote creativity and innovation specifically because they protect the rights and dignity of every person. They are the communities that will help make the Sustainable Development Goals achievable. They're the communities that will continue to grow, prosper, and succeed in this Century of Cities.

If you remember only one word when you think of the New Urban Agenda, let that word be "possibility." This bold framework asks all of us to dream big about the future that's in our power to create. With cross-sector partnership, with a commitment to fostering governments and institutions that are responsive and accountable to the people we serve, with new models of financing that drive investment into the communities that need it most, what can we do in this Century of Cities to address our most serious challenges?

How many lives can we save by making our cities more resilient to the threats associated with climate change, including extreme weather events, mass migration, disease outbreaks, and economic insecurity? How can we help local job markets so that in the future they won't just support careers, but will help foster entrepreneurs too? That kind of transformational change can't happen in a single year or, even, in a single political cycle. But it can happen. And it will, if the nations represented here bring the same commitment and moral imagination that was demonstrated in developing the New Urban Agenda to the work of making it a reality. Thank you for your insight, thank you for your leadership, and thank you for your partnership. Helping our cities adapt and thrive

in this new era of unprecedented urban growth is perhaps the central challenge of our time. Let's meet it together.