

**The Speech of His Excellency the Minister of
Public Works and Housing**

Eng. Sami Halaseh

THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN

TO

Habitat III

QUITO–ECUADOR

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Your Excellency President Rafael Delgado
Your Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Your Majesties, Highnesses
Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen
Honorable Guests

It is my pleasure to convey to you the greetings and regards of His Majesty King Abdullah the 2nd Ibn AL Hussein of Jordan and wishes for the success of Habitat III.

I am pleased to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to the state of Ecuador for hosting this important international event conference.

Despite the turmoil in the Middle East today, Jordan has proven to be a country of safety and stability *within* our region thanks to the wise leadership of His Majesty and the resilience of the Jordanian people who have always embraced tolerance and peace over sectarian hatred and conflict.

We have also been a haven of safety and stability *for* our region. Today, Jordan is host to over 1.7 Million refugees from Syria. That's 20% of our population creating ongoing strain on our urban environment, economic and social infrastructure.

As His Majesty has made clear not just during this humanitarian crisis but others before it that have displaced Iraqis and Palestinians, Jordan always does what it can to provide safe harbor for those in need.

Despite our ongoing best efforts, there is no denying that our cities, towns and supporting infrastructure – from hospitals, to schools, to housing stock, to water, sanitation and transport systems – are under immense strain.

Furthermore, the economic and social impact of the Syria crisis continues to impact all sectors and communities of our country.

Our economic performance is under pressure because of the impact on our national budget and trade balance. $\frac{1}{4}$ of our national budget is now spent on refugee crisis response programs and activities.

The academic performance of our children is under pressure because of the over-crowding in many schools as we have tried to accommodate the needs of Syrian children and their right to an ongoing education.

Our labor markets have had to accommodate a surge of Syrians looking for work and placing pressure of wages and vacancies for Jordanians.

While the London donor's conference and other international appeals through the United Nations system have been of assistance, we continue to call on the international community to step forward and do more. Not just in Jordan but for the internally displaced inside Syria and for other neighboring countries such as Lebanon. We are the front line of a global crisis that demands a coordinated global response.

It is unknown when this crisis will end and so in the immediate term the international community, and all of those here at Habitat, need to redouble our efforts to find creative, scalable and sustainable solutions that can help host countries like Jordan to withstand the huge burdens upon us.

But in the spirit of this event let me conclude on a more positive and aspiration note.

While our shared aspiration to define an international agenda and standards of excellence for sustainable development remain unchanged, the context we find ourselves in today is radically different from the world of 1996 when the Istanbul Declaration was signed.

We have crossed the 50% threshold of people living in urban environments.

We must find shelter and quality of life solutions for the more than 60 million people who are displaced in the world today.

The emergence of a global digital economy has sparked profound technological innovation transforming the connectivity and mobility of citizens and opening up new and exciting possibilities for how we design and manage urban cities and towns.

Exciting new advances in low cost housing design and building materials offer new prospect for scalable solutions to help meet the shelter needs of those living in poverty and those who have been displaced.

While the scale of the challenges ahead remains immense, we are arguable better equipped now than ever before – with new technologies and new business models - to address these challenges with creativity and coordinated action.

For our part in Jordan, we have had no choice but to meet these challenges on and to be bold in our actions.

The Syria crisis has sparked innovation in the way in which we have gone about designing and managing refugee camps. A mindset of creative problem solving and prototyping has underpinned a number of innovations in partnerships with agencies such as UNHCR, including the use of Jordanian iris scan technology and smart cards to help manage the processing of refugees and the integrity of the services provided to them.

Second, with the assistance of the World Bank, the government of Jordan has started to work on a new national housing strategy. We have also recently developed a strategy for upgrading the capability of the national engineering, construction and housing cluster to meet the housing needs of our rapidly expanding cities and towns where over 80% of the Syrian refugee population now reside.

Let me conclude by daring to look beyond the current cycle of violence and instability in the Middle East today. We do not know when but the time will come to rebuild Syria as well as significant parts of Iraq, Gaza, Yemen and Libya. That will be a massive global challenge – requiring hundreds of billions of dollars of capital and a concerted international effort. Some have called for an Arab Marshall Plan as the umbrella for that effort.

The New Urban Agenda we define at this gathering in Quito should provide the principles and the standards for human settlement that guide the reconstruction of the Middle East and indeed other areas of the world ravaged by conflict and poverty.

With that foundation in place, governments around the world must then embrace a spirit of partnership with the private sector to encourage the further development and use of new technologies and business models to deliver new shelter and urban living solutions.

The opportunity over the horizon is an exciting one. Rather than rebuild what was there before, we have the opportunity to reimaging and redesign better human settlements for the people of the Middle East.

Thank you your Excellency for hosting this conference..... for all who participated to make this gathering a great successful global event and we thank the government and people of the Ecuador for their hospitality, wishing them success and prosperity.