

Address by L N Sisulu, MP, Minister of Human Settlements of South Africa at the opening ceremony of the Habitat III Thematic Meeting on Informal Settlements: Leading Change in the City: From Slums to Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable Human Settlements

7 April 2016, Pretoria

Secretary-General of Habitat III, Dr Joan Clos

Honourable Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Ambassadors and Heads of Delegation

Members of the Executive Council

Chair and Members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Human Settlements

Chair and Members of the Select Committee of the National Council of Provinces

Mayors

Participants

Members of the Media

In six months' time the world will gather in Quito, Ecuador to decide on an action agenda to address urbanisation in the next twenty years. South Africa is pleased to host this conference, dealing with one of the themes that resonates with our own pre-occupation. We are pleased to welcome Dr Joan Clos and all our delegates to our part of the world, not only as hosts of this exciting conference, but to also showcase some of our efforts in addressing the issues that we will be seized with. For many years we have

had very close working relations with UN-Habitat and have benefitted as a country, and especially as a continent from the proximity we have had with UN-Habitat. Our policies have matured significantly as you will no doubt see. The working relationship with UN-Habitat was greatly strengthened by our joint lobbying in the run up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), hosted by the United Nations in Johannesburg in 2002. Our joint successes resulted in the issue of shelter for the first time being placed on the Heads of State agenda, alongside other major concerns, such as water, energy, environment and health.

Emboldened by this success, we lobbied and succeeded in ensuring that urban shelter, and especially the lack of it, found its place on the agenda of the AU Heads of State the following year, in 2003. Imagine our unrestrained joy when, in the conference statement, the Heads of State resolved in Maputo to deal with the issue of urban shelter, because:

“... if left unchecked, rapid urbanisation is leading to the urbanisation of poverty with attendant problems that have condemned the majority of urban dwellers to a life under squalor conditions in slums and other unplanned neighbourhoods ...”

We owe it to the UN-Habitat that we, African Ministers of Human Settlements, came together in Durban, here in South Africa in 2005 and established the first African Ministers’ Conference on Housing and Urban Development. And for the first time, we as a continent were able to put our heads together and tackle the challenge that faced us on the shelter front

and the shocking fact that since 2005, approximately 5 million people per year move to cities and towns in Africa. Africa is currently 41% urbanised.

There have been extensive consultations between ourselves and UN-Habitat and we are very privileged to have been given the opportunity to work so closely with the agency. We hope that we will continue on this path to see the new urban agenda adopted at Habitat III and beyond. It has been a very fulfilling relationship and our gratitude to you, Dr Clos, and your Deputy Executive Director, who has been with us from time to time and joined us when we signed a social contract with all our stakeholders in October 2014. The engagement has enriched our understanding of our environment. Your experience, wisdom and insight will ensure that we can share knowledge and good practice as well as explore some new ideas.

We are now at the point where we offered to host this official preparatory thematic meeting on informal settlements as our contribution to the Habitat III process. This is our way of showing, Dr Clos that we are a people that are very passionate about the issue of houses, the security and comfort that is promised to our people in their pursuit of a better life. We are grateful to the Habitat III Secretariat for giving us this opportunity to play our part. We are also grateful to all of you for your passionate interest in making sure that informal settlements and slums are a major component of the new agenda.

What we will be discussing here today and tomorrow will be considered in the draft outcome document for Habitat III. This conference builds upon many previous deliberations, at UN-Habitat, at the World

Summit for Sustainable Development, at World Urban Forums, in our respective regional structures dealing with housing and urban development such as in AMCHUD, in APMCHUD, and in MINURIVI, etc.

This is the first United Nations meeting dealing with slums and informal settlements since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its stand-alone goal SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The recognition of the importance of human settlements and cities for sustainable development is a very positive achievement in itself and I, as a returning Minister to this environment was extremely delighted to discover that we are still on track with these matters that we were so integral to as we sought to ensure international commitment to the issue of informal settlements.

We, as the South African government remained very committed to the development of sustainable human settlements. We moved from a previous policy, based on housing to a new policy which we, in Amchud endorsed as a policy framework for developing countries and now we talk about sustainable, integrated human settlements. We have emphasised informal settlements upgrading, and wherever possible in-situ, as a way to ensure we improve people's lives where they live. We have created a National Upgrading Support Programme to assist provincial and local government where they may lack the capacity to implement the informal settlements upgrading programme. We have also established the Housing Development Agency whose primary responsibility is to procure state, private and communal land and buildings for use in the development of

human settlements and release land for the development of human settlements.

In developing our policies we have learnt from both national and international experiences. Working with UN Habitat has been an extremely enriching experience. Our policies continue to be improved and adjusted to meet the locally relevant needs.

In spite of extremely good progress made, you would have been told that we have built and created housing opportunities for 4.3 million people, giving us approximately 20 million beneficiaries since the dawn of democracy in 1994, many challenges still remain.

We estimate that some 1,8 million people still do not have access to adequate housing and live in informal settlements and backyards. We realise that the future prosperity of our cities, which are the engines of our economic growth, lies in investment in infrastructure and human settlements. We will therefore continue to improve our policies and investment programmes based on good practice nationally and abroad.

The Millennium Development Goals of 2000 with a target of achieving cities without slums, resonated, not only with the UN-Habitat agenda, but also with our own founding liberation demands from our founding document, the Freedom Charter of 1956, that indicated our pledge to our people that there shall be no slums. We work avidly to pursue that goal and having signed the MDG, we had hoped that by 2014 we would have eradicated poverty to the extent of totally

eliminating the need for slums. You would have seen, however, even as you were driving through the country, that we were not able to fulfil that pledge. We are not as fortunate as Algeria, who have achieved this incredible milestone. The follow-up development agenda to the MDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals, also include prominent reference to the spirit of the Habitat Agenda. The urban-focused SDG, Goal 11, can also be seen as an extension of an idea first set out by the Habitat Agenda. Over 100 countries have adopted constitutional rights to adequate housing, a major success of the Habitat Agenda. A worrying trend for the sustainable development of human settlements is that international aid organizations and bilateral development agencies have steadily reduced their investments in cities and slashed their urban programmes. This challenges the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

With the current focus of Europe on the Syrian refugee crisis, much of the donor funding by the industrialised countries has been diverted to that cause leaving the rest of the developing world with less resources for addressing the pressing issues of inequality and poverty. It is clear that the Habitat Agenda has contributed significantly to the development of sustainable human settlements over the past two decades.

The world of 2016 is in a very different political, social, and financial space than when we started, and there is a growing realisation that many developing countries will not follow the industrialisation trajectory that made the industrialised world wealthy. We have also realised that for many developing countries old paradigms of development paths no longer hold true. How will this affect our cities and towns and the dream of “a

good life” for our citizens? This is where we are as we craft the “*New Urban Agenda*” and we take from the past that which is good and leave out that which will not work for us.

The Third UN Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat III, scheduled to take place in October this year in Quito, Ecuador, provides an opportunity to adjust our strategies and trajectory for the future of our cities, towns and other settlements. It will aim to promote greater equity in the face of globalisation, safety and security, urban resilience, adequate housing, and reduction in slums. In short it will be the next plank in the international and national agendas for a better life for all our citizens in sustainable human settlements.

It is customary in the UN system to have a variety of widely participatory regional meetings and round tables to consolidate all perspectives and reach a consensus on the human settlements agenda for the next two decades. South Africa is proud to participate in these preparations and host this Thematic Event on “*Leading change in the city*”. The focus on informal settlements and improving the lives of those that live there is particularly relevant to the African Region which has been struggling to deal with this tremendous challenge, within a diminishing resource envelop.

In the State of Cities report, 2014, UN Habitat offers some encouragement by pointing out that there exist real opportunities for embracing new urban paradigms that are more conducive to both the present and long-term needs of African cities and nations. Cities are not

stand-alone entities. They are all part and parcel of often-shared geographical, social, environmental and political contexts.

Given that many of the challenges ahead are of a trans-boundary nature, this UN Habitat conference can serve to stimulate local, national and regional cooperation among African cities and nations to re-imagine shared approaches to urban development and capture the most effective interventions to facilitate sustainable urban and other transitions in Africa.

Countries throughout the world have been experiencing rapid urbanisation for decades, and this will continue to happen particularly in Africa and parts of Asia. Combined with increasing urban poverty, chronic shortages of serviced land and adequate housing, and ineffective and inappropriate urban policies and planning approaches, large numbers of urban dwellers have had few other options than to settle in life threatening slums. Today, around a billion urban residents live in slums globally and unless urgent action is taken, this number is likely to increase in the coming decades, posing a significant threat to the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of cities.

We realise too that over 90% of urban growth is occurring in the developing world and an estimated 70 million new residents are added to urban areas of developing countries each year.

The significant increase of the world's urban population leads to a crisis of unprecedented magnitude in urban shelter provision. All these new urban citizens need to be provided with shelter, employment and with

urban basic services. The limited capacity of most urban economies in developing countries is unable to meet more than a reduced part of these needs, so that most of the employment and housing are found in the informal sector, where around 67% of the urban population in developing countries are currently living and working. These people live in overcrowded and unserviced communities, often located on marginal and dangerous land, with difficult access to clean water, sanitation and energy.

The Conference will explore approaches and strategies in the inter-related areas of tenure security and housing, livelihoods, safety, and governance. Urban Planning and policy interventions and policies aimed at improving the life living conditions of informal settlements dwellers face key challenges, related to many different fields of urban expertise such as land legality issues, tenure security, land availability, administrative and political issues, provision of infrastructure, and services, and socio-economic facilities, availability of poor appropriate construction materials and building technologies, poverty, and high unemployment, and low education rates vulnerability.

Those, and other related issues will be discussed during the Habitat III Thematic Meeting on Informal Settlements in Pretoria, South Africa. Habitat III Thematic Meeting will involve a wide range of participants that will deliver policy recommendations in the form of a final participants' declaration, which will be considered as an official input to the New Urban Agenda.

The General Assembly of the United Nations will hold the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in the city of Quito, Ecuador from 17 to 20 October 2016. Habitat III is expected to generate a 'New Urban Agenda' for the 21st century. Habitat III will secure a renewed global commitment to addressing housing and sustainable urbanisation through the adoption of a forward-looking, action oriented outcome document.

South Africa is experiencing such pressure in its delivery of housing and housing opportunities, that we used the possibility of this opportunity to host the Thematic Meeting on Informal Settlements, "*Leading Change in the City: from slums to integrated, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements*". The Thematic Meeting, through its Declaration on Informal Settlements will seek to develop thematic inputs to the Habitat III outcome document ("the New Urban Agenda") towards a global plan of action and will explore approaches and strategies in the inter-related areas of tenure security and housing, livelihoods, safety, and governance. For this purpose, lessons learned, challenges, pro-poor solutions, and partnership mechanisms will be shared. This shall inspire governments, civil society and other stakeholders to come up with an agreed framework and global action plan in the form of a final Declaration on the Informal Settlements to inform the New Urban Agenda to be adopted at Habitat III.

The Thematic Meeting will focus on slum upgrading and prevention taking the lessons learnt from various relevant projects and programmes, including UN-Habitat's Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme. The themes will be elaborated in the framework of the Habitat III preparatory

process, also connecting themes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Proposed issues for discussion include:

- Preparing for a New Urban Agenda building on the SDGs – where do we stand with the Habitat Agenda and what should the New Urban Agenda reflect concerning slums and housing;
- Taking stock of MDG 7d and preparing for the implementation of the SDG 11; with a focus on how to monitor the implementation and measure impact;
- Inclusive national urban policies for prosperity for all;
- Integrated planning and financial, political, legislative, institutional and technical aspects of slum upgrading;
- Innovations on access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, including incremental housing and participatory planning;
- Slum prevention through planned, inclusive, city-wide approaches that better understand land markets and financing options including planned city extension, land readjustment, infill, in-situ upgrading and incremental housing;
- Innovative approaches to securing tenure in informal settlements, particularly for women and youth;
- Building the inclusive urban context - linking slums and informal settlement upgrading and prevention to: Job creation and income generating activities; Safer Cities through increased equality; Local innovations for equity in cities; and Human rights;

- Roles of national and local authorities, NGOs, CBOs, slum dwellers themselves, private sector and academia for sustainable and inclusive approaches to slum upgrading and prevention.

I invite you to be part of this great endeavour to “*lead change in the city*”, and to find a better life for all our citizens in human settlements which best meet their particular needs.

I thank you.