

MESSAGE FROM UN SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN TO THE SECOND WORLD URBAN FORUM, BARCELONA, 13 SEPTEMBER 2004

It is with great pleasure that I address this second World Urban Forum, a capstone event for the highly successful Universal Forum of Cultures being held this summer in Barcelona, the heart of Spanish Catalonia. For member states of the United Nations, there is no subject of greater consequence than the plurality of cultures. We are, above all, striving for peace and unity among nations. And, because it is culture that both defines and differentiates nations, every effort made to apprehend and understand our cultural differences is to be commended.

Rapid urbanization is fast becoming one of the major challenges facing the international community, and the World Urban Forum offers an opportunity to discuss both the problems and the possibilities of the phenomenon. In a world beset by conflict and intolerance, the theme of the second World Urban Forum -- "Cities: Crossroads of culture, inclusiveness and integration?" -- could not be more relevant. It is critical the world's cities, now home to a majority of the world's population, are safe places where all people can benefit from urban development.

The theme is most important for raising issues of awareness, acceptance and inclusion. Today, our cities are facing the challenges of a highly mobile world. Globalization is bringing us closer together in many ways. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our cities where we now cross paths and rub elbows with people from many other cultural backgrounds.

Cities are recognized as national engines of economic growth. But they are much more. Cities are also the crucible for cultural fusion. Standing astride every intersection on the global network of trade and migration, the world's cities must become shining examples of inclusiveness and equity as called for in the Millennium Declaration. Otherwise, they will remain potential flashpoints of conflict and reservoirs of poverty – barriers to humanity's further development.

In multi-dimensional global conferences like the World Urban Forum as well as in simple bilateral relations, we see much being done by cities to share experience and expertise. Within the international context, cities, individually and collectively, have long contributed directly to global peace and welfare. Indeed, international development cooperation has been enhanced through city-to-city collaboration and consultation among associations of cities.

Ladies and gentlemen, the social and economic structure of cities is today being reshaped as a result of accelerated mobility and migration. As cities are increasingly home to a diversity of cultures, there is an urgent need for problem solving and mediating skills within the city.

Internal diplomacy has become indispensable for sustainable development. A world of change brings with it fear and conflict, which Governments and their local authorities must allay and resolve with sensitivity, skill and tact. Only by inviting all citizens and stakeholders, new and old, into the full process of urban governance can we create and realize a common vision for the future of the city. This is the core message that I convey to you. It is a message best articulated in the Habitat Agenda and demonstrated here by the World Urban Forum, itself.

In looking for exemplary practitioners of internal diplomacy, we need look no farther than His Excellency, Prime Minister Rafic Hariri of Lebanon, recipient of this year's

Special Citation for the 2004 UN-HABITAT Scroll of Honour. I congratulate the Prime Minister for his outstanding and visionary leadership in the post-conflict reconstruction of Lebanon. Through successful internal diplomacy, Mr. Hariri has helped his people regenerate and revivify the city of Beirut and heal its social and economic wounds.

Barcelona and Beirut exemplify the two dimensions of diplomacy, both pointing the way toward easing of cultural frictions. May each, in its own way, inspire your dialogue throughout this coming week.

It is in this spirit that I invite you all to intensify your diplomatic efforts, both by collaborating with one another across borders and by crossing internal boundaries to foster cooperation among citizens of your oftentimes disparate communities.

There can be no more important goal in an urbanizing world than to reach amicable solutions to urban problems brought about by accelerated change. By bringing together so many of the key actors in sustainable urban development, the World Urban Forum is moving us all toward this goal. My congratulations go to UN-HABITAT for having initiated the World Urban Forum and for having mobilized all partners, particularly local authorities, and to the city of Barcelona, the Government of Spain and people of Catalonia for graciously hosting the second World Urban Forum.

I thank you and wish you every success in your dialogues, discussions and deliberations here in Barcelona.