

MRS. TIBAIJUKA'S ADDRESS TO THE GLOBAL PLATFORM -

Honored Ministers, my colleague Mr. John Holmes, Mr. Salvano Briceno Director of the ISDR, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity today, to address the inaugural meeting of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Today, we are gathered to launch a new stage in the efforts of the United Nations and its partners to make our nations more resilient to the threats of natural catastrophes that devastate populations worldwide. I am proud of having been a part of events leading to this day, and look forward to continuing UN-HABITAT's engagement with the Global Platform through to the achievement of its exemplary objectives.

However, we cannot overlook the challenges we all face building resilience in the cities, towns and villages that make up the nations of the world. Recent natural disasters have, in their magnitude, clearly shown that – for example - what happens in Banda Aceh has a direct impact on economies of South Eastern Asia – that a hurricane in Louisiana affects foreign aid destined for Africa – and that the un-checked industrialized waste production of a few may condemn millions through climate change and sea-level rise.

Add to this, that this year – 2007 – is the year within which for the first time, the world's urban population will equal that of the global rural population and that within the next 13 years, fully two thirds of the global population will reside in urban environs. Today however, the majority of the world's population lives in cities of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants; and it is these cities that shall continue to absorb new residents at a higher rate than others in the future. It is also these cities that present the greatest opportunities for mitigation efforts now – before they become the mega-cities of the future.

While cities are centers of action, decision-making and commerce, they are, by virtue of their concentrations of population, also centers of risk. Increasingly, in particular in developing nations, urbanization is overwhelming the capacities of both local government and state institutions to cope. In Africa, where the rate of urbanization is highest, the vulnerability of the poor is sadly deepening. Families fleeing from conflict, drought, flooding, and other natural and human-made disasters, often arrive with minimal assets, having lost their properties, and end up in informal settlements facing new threats of disease, fires, and insecurity. Among these victims, I am sad to remind you, a majority of the most vulnerable remain women and the children they support.

However, this can change, and I am pleased to be present here during the launch of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction to remind you that the Hyogo Framework for Action calls upon nations to implement its five objectives constructed to ensure their citizens and representatives are aware of every opportunity to reduce vulnerabilities and increase resilience to natural and human-made risks. By your presence here, I can see obvious commitment on the part of states.

Also, I can see representatives of many international agencies gathered here, and wish to share with all of you some of our own thinking.

The international community is performing an ever-widening range of recovery and rehabilitation activities. This exacerbates the fundamental challenges of the crisis management and recovery processes; how to bridge the gaps that have repeatedly emerged between emergency recovery and sustainable development efforts, and how to provide national and local government, civil society and business organizations with practical strategies to mitigate and recover from crises, and also to prevent lapsing back into crisis. It is equally critical to build the capacity of national and international aid agencies to deliver rapid response services that integrate a longer term developmental strategy. Based on these changing dynamics in international assistance, it is clear that a new approach is required. Through analysis of these needs, our concept of “Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction” has emerged. The essence of this approach is that where necessary, there is no logical reasoning that prevents development activities starting at the point of crisis. This requires development actors working alongside relief and emergency organizations; planning and advising early recovery opportunities and hopefully finding means of reducing the period of crisis while advancing the prospects for recovery and development. In an effort to ‘build back better’, the potential for integrating resilience measures is highest during these times of flux. It is also essential to build trust among the victims that they will get support beyond survive.

My agency has as its fundamental mandate the promotion of socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all – this is a task we face daily, and interpret throughout the development continuum from crisis to prosperity for all. Focusing primarily on urban populations small and large, I am pleased to announce to you today, that as an element of the Global Platform, UN-HABITAT, together with the ISDR and other partners is launching a Global Forum on Urban Risk. Its inaugural meeting will take place tomorrow in a Side Event; and I encourage all of you, in particular those seized with the magnitude of vulnerability in informal settlements, those seeking to measure capacity of urban managers and poor communities to mitigate risk, and those wishing to explore how to create incentives for disaster resilient housing, schools, clinics and other public buildings - to attend. UN-HABITAT will take this initiative forward and report on the progress made during our next World Urban Forum to be held in October 2008 in Nanjing, China.

Finally, I would like to call your attention to the UN-HABITAT’s Global Report on Human Settlements 2007 focused on *Urban Safety and Security* to be launched during the World Habitat Day event that will show how important disaster preparedness is to this undertaking.

In closing, the Global Platform together with its action oriented Hyogo Framework for Action will continue to have the support of UN-HABITAT in our joint endeavors to provide safe and resilient towns, villages and cities within the nations of the world.

I thank you,