

Country Statement - Sri Lanka

Mr. Chairman,
Executive Director of UN-Habitat
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, I would like to thank the UN-HABITAT for providing me this opportunity to address this distinguished gathering at the 26th Governing Council of the UN-HABITAT.

I wish to take this occasion to convey our regrets on behalf of Hon. Sajith Premadasa, Minister of Housing and Construction, of the Government of Sri Lanka for his inability to participate in this important session of the Governing Council. I bring his greetings and good wishes for the success of the meeting.

It is indeed an honor to address you at this high-level forum of Governments that charts the policy for the United Nations Human Settlements with the special theme of “Opportunities for the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda” and the sub themes of “Towards inclusive, sustainable and adequate housing for a better future”; “Synergies and financing for sustainable urbanization”; and “Integrated human settlements planning for sustainable urbanization”. As a member country, Sri Lanka has an excellent association with the UN Habitat which seeks to strengthen commitment for the implementation of Habitat Agenda.

Urbanization is one of the decisive trends of our time, and increasing number of cities are home to a growing urban population, while the demand for natural resources and space is on the rise. Cities are hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, production, social development and much more. At their best, cities have enabled people to advance socially and economically. Global challenges therefore, increasingly require sustainable solutions, whether for managing scarce resources, rising social inequalities or climate change.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

Development of sustainable human settlements and the strengthening of the construction industry are the objectives of the Ministry of Housing and Construction. His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka has declared 2017 as the year of poverty alleviation and the Ministry of Housing and Construction has been tasked with the responsibility for ensuring “Shelter for all”.

Sri Lanka is one of the first countries to commit to the implementation of an "enabling strategy" in human settlements development. In Sri Lanka, it has been proven in the past that people's participation is the key to the success of any housing program. The origin of the idea of ‘enabling’ and supporting the efforts of the people and their community organizations to develop their own housing goes back to the Million Houses Program of the early 1980s.

The Ministry of Housing and Construction as the Ministry responsible for "Housing the Nation" is in the process of enabling low income and marginalized

rural communities under the "Samata Sevana" (Shelter for All) national housing program to build their own houses, utilizing family labor, community support and their own financial resources. Towards the alleviation of poverty, the program will be further expanded with the participation of stakeholders, developing housing programs targeting urban slum and shanty communities in addition to the construction of 500,000 houses for the urban middle income families through a public-private partnership mechanism.

**Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,**

Today, Sri Lanka stands at a veritable crossroads in her history of human settlements. As a proponent of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, we are pleased to inform this august forum that a new/revised National Housing Policy has been prepared recently, in keeping with the guidelines of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal No. 11 which promotes the realization of the Right to Adequate Housing and contributes to inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. New strategies will be formulated and implemented under the revised policy.

In this regard, enhancing capacities at the city level will be essential for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The role of the Government authorities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda and sustainable urban development in the New Urban Agenda requires moving from the Government's direct management to an inclusive and collaborative methodology including collaborating with local governments, private sector, civil

society, women's and youth organizations, persons with disabilities, professionals, academic institutions, trade unions, employers, migrant associations, cultural associations and others to leverage the opportunities for urban economic development as well as to identify and address existing and emerging challenges.

The Global Community, in its Quito declaration of the New Urban Agenda in November 2016, has committed to a paradigm shift in the way human settlements, especially urban settlements are planned, developed and managed, recognizing it as an essential instrument in the achievement of all sustainable development goals. The New Urban Agenda places 'Housing at the Centre'. The revised policy is committed to the implementation of the concept of sustainable housing and human settlements development. The revised policy therefore, urges the adoption and facilitation of the implementation of several key measures for sustainable human settlements development such as; Promotion of security of tenure for all residents, particularly the urban poor through innovative mechanisms to utilize public and private land, including fiscal incentives to bring under-utilized land in to use; Development and use of Housing Designs, Building Materials and Construction Methods which can mitigate the effects of natural disasters; Establishment of mechanisms for reduction, recycling and safe disposal of waste in human settlements; etc.

Mr. Chairman, Executive Director of UN-Habitat

Distinguished Delegates,

We are a country with a history for introducing innovative housing and human settlements solutions. We were at the forefront of developing and practicing the ‘enabling strategy’ in housing development. The year 1987 was declared the “International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYHS) by the UN General Assembly, on a proposal made by the then Prime Minister and Minister of Housing of Sri Lanka Hon. Ranasinghe Premadasa. This declaration raised global awareness on the appalling living conditions of the world’s urban and rural poor and consequently made homelessness a focus of world public concern. The year 2017 marks the 30th anniversary of the International Year of Shelter and this is a deserving opportunity to reiterate Sri Lanka’s commitment to promote, protect and ensure the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate shelter.

UN-Habitat has a long history of cooperation with the Government of Sri Lanka dating back to the Vancouver Summit in 1976 with the Ministry of Housing as its focal point. Recently, on 30th August 2016, the Ministry of Housing and Construction signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the UN-Habitat to strengthen the partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka.

To conclude, I would like to express the appreciation of the Government of Sri Lanka to the Executive Director and his team, on the preparatory work done for this Governing Council sessions. I would also like to thank the committee of permanent representatives for all the hard work which greatly contributed to the preparation.

Last but not least, allow me to thank the Government and the people of Kenya for hosting this important session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat, for their excellent arrangements for holding this prestigious meeting and for their outstanding hospitality. Thank You.