

IRAQ NATIONAL HOUSING CONFERENCE

BAGHDAD, 14-15 JANUARY 2009



**MESSAGE OF EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, UN-HABITAT**

Housing is a fundamental human right and it is the duty of all responsible governments to ensure that each and every citizen has access to adequate housing along with all basic infrastructure and services such

as access roads, water and sanitation, electricity, other community services. The failure to do so in a timely and cost effective manner results in the proliferation of slums which are the breeding grounds of disease and deprivation, the loss of human dignity and ultimately deep rooted frustrations that find vent in violence both within homes and outside. This is a major reason why world leaders identified the improvement of the living conditions of slum dwellers as a major target area in the Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000. In Iraq there are various estimates that suggest 30% of the population live in extremely degraded neighbourhoods that would qualify as slums. We also have additional challenge posed by displacements and returns.

I believe that improving the quality of life within run-down neighbourhoods can quickly and effectively contribute to peace building. The delivery of adequate housing is a critical part of that equation as it also creates lots of jobs for both the skilled and unskilled thereby contributing to alleviating

poverty. It is important to note that a vibrant construction sector, if driven by private enterprise and investors within a conducive regulatory environment, is one of the most powerful engines of national and local economic growth due to the size of investments and the various productive linkages to other industries and service providers. In addition, housing, construction, and building materials can jointly account for the creation of enormous assets for the population, thus reducing poverty and marginalization. Our experience in Iraq over the last five years shows that a relatively small investment of \$ 12.0 million helped to rehabilitate around 5000 houses thereby not only benefiting 40,000 occupants but also directly generating 0.35 million person days of employment in the construction sector.

The primary role of any government in discharging its housing mandate is to create an enabling environment, which harnesses the comparative advantages of all actors, national

ministries and local authorities, the private sector, civil society, community-based organizations and individual home builders, and fosters constructive partnerships to deliver adequate housing in a cost-effective and timely manner.

The inclusion of civil society in policy making and strategy development processes is a corner stone of real and meaningful democracy giving voice to the people in the decisions that affect their daily lives and enabling communities to overcome the devastation of war and conflict. Our experiences provide ample evidence that participatory democracy is an essential complement to representative democracy for meeting the needs of the majority, namely the urban poor. Therefore, UN-HABITAT's approach to housing and urban development is predicated on the principles of people-centred development.

The housing problem is most effectively addressed within the

framework of sustainable urban development that includes fiscal and political decentralisation to enable local authorities to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in spatial planning and land management, pro-poor housing and urban development, and the provision of basic infrastructure and services, particularly water and sanitation.

I believe an important beginning has been made with the formulation of three Pilot Governorate Housing Strategies, which have gone through needs assessments and wide consultations, and provide valuable pointers for a National Housing Policy. I am extremely happy to note that work on the National Housing Policy is about to start. The challenge, however, is to ensure that the strategies are well resourced in order for them to be meaningfully implemented.

As with any reform process, all of this will require hard decisions and patience. Therefore, all of us also need to commit ourselves in the long-term. I take this opportunity to commit UN-

HABITAT support in policy and institutional development and in building the necessary capacities to improve housing delivery. UN-HABITAT will bring its specialized expertise and experience in the areas of land-use planning, property rights, housing, urban infrastructure and services, and urban environmental management, which are key determinants of peace-building, gender equality, and sustainable reconstruction.

I congratulate the Government of Iraq for organizing this important Conference and also all of you present for finding time to participate. I wish you all very productive discussions over these two days and I hope they will result in a well-resourced plan of action.

Thank you all and wish you a successful New Year.

Anna. K. Tibaijuka

Under Secretary General and
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