



**UN-HABITAT**

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**“Strategic Partnerships: Making Good on the Millennium Development Goals”**

Ambassador Masekela,  
His worship Mayor Moncrief,  
SCI President Gray,  
Singer, song writer and activist, Peter Yarrow,  
Distinguished national and international delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to address the 2004 Sister City International Annual Conference, and to come to Fort Worth, Texas my first time to the great Lone Star State.

Let me begin with a brief acknowledgment to my co-speaker, Peter Yarrow. Peter, you must know that your music and everything behind it traveled far in the 1960s. Yes, I'm talking about Tanzania in East Africa. We were at that time also experiencing a period of idealism and revolutionary passion and were watching closely the developments in the United States. I admire your ability after 4 decades to keep the faith. You have so clearly learned from the past, adopted a pragmatic approach, and remained grounded in principles of social and economic justice. I know you set an important example for others. You certainly do for me.

The key thing is for each of us to apply this spirit in our respective work and where possible, find ways to leverage that spirit by working together. This is the essence of strategic partnerships and making good on the Millennium Development Goals, the topic of my address today.

For me, in my work at the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, or UN-HABITAT, based in Nairobi, Kenya, the greatest challenge at hand is to tackle poverty. Particularly how to address its harshest manifestation in cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America and in countries with economies in transition. The situation in these cities is harsh. Our research indicates that there are over 900 million slum dwellers today and that if the situation is left unchecked, there will be close to 2 billion by the year 2030. I am talking about 900 million people for whom obtaining one good meal, clean drinking water, and some kind of work that will bring in a few dollars is a serious daily struggle. I am referring to places where 500 people share one toilet, 5 people squeeze into a 10 by 10 foot shack, and where people pay more for water, rent, and credit than their up-market counterparts in the same city. In such conditions, not surprisingly, we find very high rates of HIV/AIDS, infant mortality, massive unemployment, crime and insecurity, and the absence of basic education and health care, to say nothing of indignity, frustration, and a breakdown of the social fabric. And we find in the slums that the weight of trying to survive in such conditions is borne disproportionately by women. Women who do not enjoy what little rights are afforded to slum dwellers and their organizations.

How do we address this situation? To begin with, we can 't go it alone. We need the political will of the larger international community. Fortunately, political commitment of this kind is finally at hand with the Millennium Development Goals.

In September 2000, 161 Member States of the United Nations, the governments of the world, sat down in New York and adopted the Millennium Declaration to try to confront poverty in all its dimensions. The Declaration was a breath of fresh air because it melted down into one simple document the outcomes of previous declarations associated with the various global summits of the 1990s, from Rio, to Beijing, to Cairo, and to Istanbul. And more profoundly, it set out not just principles and goals but actual targets: 21 concrete outcomes that the international community committed itself to achieving.

In 2001, my counterparts in other funds and programmes of the United Nations and I translated the Declaration into an operational framework to help orient and prioritize our work. This framework is the Millennium Development Goals and Targets, or what is more commonly referred to as the “MDGs.”

The MDGs consist of 8 goals, each with a set of corresponding targets. In the interest of time let me simply mention the 8 briefly and those targets of immediate relevance to urban poverty. The 8 goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Goal 7 includes two key targets that give powerful focus to urban poverty:

Target 10: “Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.”

Target 11: “Achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.”

The commitment of 161 Member States to achieve these targets is a powerful, unprecedented expression of political will. It is a key ingredient in the fight against urban poverty. This said, however, many Member States are not in a position immediately to achieve the Targets 10 and 11. They require information on trends in urban poverty, tools and strategies to address the problem, technical assistance, and sustainable financing.

I can not emphasize enough the importance of providing governments and their partners in communities, cities and the private sector with these kinds of inputs. There is renewed commitment but without these inputs, many Member States will falter. It is for this reason that much of our effort at UN-HABITAT is dedicated to working with Member States to augment their skills and policies with different types of assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me mention briefly four ways we go about this.

**First, we monitor trends in urban poverty, conduct research, consolidate best practice, and produce flagship reports.** Last year we published the Global Report on Human Settlements: Facing the Slum Challenge, a 400-page, dense overview on the causes of slum formation and solutions for reducing urban poverty. The publication received widespread media attention in Newsweek Magazine, the Economist, and over 50 local and regional periodicals. Why all the attention for a lengthy UN publication? I'd like to think it was because we consolidated all views on the subject and produced a readable publication. But there's a deeper reason. There is very little available information on urban poverty. Policy makers, activists, practitioners, scholars and interested lay readers that are interested in urbanization and the challenge of cities lack solid evidence to support their work. Our task at UN-HABITAT is to fill this void by serving as a repository of knowledge on urban issues. In addition to the flagship reports, we maintain a user-friendly database of over 5,000 best practices. We also work with 100s of research institutions and central bureaus of statistics to conduct research and establish local urban observatories that strengthen their capacity to collect and use data on cities.

**Second, we make available to governments and their development partners a range of advocacy instruments, capacity building programmes and tools that can help them achieve the MDG targets.** The Global Campaign for Secure Tenure and the Global Campaign for Good Urban Governance are two such advocacy instruments. Local actors in a given city -- governments, community organizations, professional associations, and NGOs -- can use the Campaigns to raise awareness and accelerate ongoing initiatives. In 2002, for example, the National Federation of Shack Dwellers of Namibia, the City of Windhoek, and the Government of Namibia jointly launched the Campaigns together with UN-HABITAT in a gathering of over 5,000 slum dwellers. The event and follow up actions led to the adoption by Parliament of legislation on flexible land tenure systems. The legal reforms protect slum dwellers in Namibia against illegal forced evictions. And they provide them with security of tenure and the right to be part of the city, such that they can contribute to its growth and enjoy its basic services.

We try to complement our advocacy work and Global Campaigns by working with governments to develop and test tools that reduce urban poverty, facilitate partnerships among local actors, and strengthen their capacity to plan and manage cities. Support of this kind is directed through 6 thematic global management programmes based in Nairobi, Kenya and applied on a pilot basis in over 50 countries. These include the programmes of Sustainable Cities, Urban Management, Water for African Cities, Housing Rights, Water for Asian Cities, Safer Cities, and Cities without Slums.

**Third, we provide technical assistance to governments and work with them to execute specific development projects.** The Government of Bangladesh, for example, requested UN-HABITAT to execute a comprehensive programme to reduce poverty in four cities. In 1995 the then new Government of South Africa called upon our organization to assist them to implement their national people's housing programme.

More recently, Member States requested UN-HABITAT to execute reconstruction projects in countries that have experienced conflicts or disasters. We provide technical assistance on housing, urban planning, land management and basic service delivery in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Kosovo, among other countries experiencing such hardship.

**Finally, a forth way we assist Member States to deliver on the MDG targets is to link urban development projects to sources of financing, engaging local banks and international financial institutions and donor facilities.** A new activity at UN-HABITAT, our efforts to mobilize resources for development projects take two forms. The first is to link our advocacy and capacity-building programmes mentioned above with loans and investments of the World Bank and regional development banks. In Asia, for example, we have established a memorandum of understanding with the Asian Development Bank to fast-track USD 500 million in loans to cities where UN-HABITAT is implementing its Water Asian Cities Programme. The second is to work in individual countries with banks, housing finance institutions and micro finance institutions to mobilize domestic capital for shelter and urban infrastructure. In our host city, Nairobi, for example, we plan to field-test a community-based home improvement loan product that will finance shelter improvements in Kibera, the largest slum in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is likely to involve households in the slum that borrow from cooperative savings and loan associations of which they are members. Local banks in Nairobi will be invited to lend to and help capitalize these associations, and international donor facilities will provide guarantees to local banks to help share the risk.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, I am excited about our work, the momentum that is building to address difficult problems, and could talk much more. But in the interest of time, let me **conclude by focusing on city governments, city-to-city cooperation and the kinds of strategic partnerships that can accelerate our collective efforts to achieve the millennium development goals and targets.**

For the past 4 years, we have initiated several strategic partnerships to strengthen local authorities. UN-HABITAT is the focal point in the United Nations System for local authorities, and in 2000, founded the United Nations Advisory Council of Local Authorities (UNACLA). Composed of Mayors and Presidents of local authority associations, UNACLA has served as a powerful instrument in raising the profile of local authorities in the international arena and in defining a positive and innovative vision of the future of the world's cities. Also in 2000, UN-HABITAT and the World Bank together with several bilateral development agencies established the Cities Alliance to further efforts by cities to upgrade informal settlements and plan strategically for the future. In May 2003, our Governing Council requested us to establish a high-level Advisory Group of Experts on Decentralization (AGRED) to augment the work of UNACLA. It is designed to guide the international dialogue on decentralization and to provide further advice on strengthening the status and role of local authorities. In May of this year in Paris, UN-HABITAT presided over the launch of the first World Congress of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) that consolidated four, previously separate international associations.

And on the horizon in September 2004, at our upcoming World Urban Forum in Barcelona, Spain, we anticipate the launching of two new initiatives that will further the work of cities and local authorities. The first is the Urban Millennium Partnership for Localizing MDGs. This programme will support the local authorities in the implementation of the MDGs and the empowerment of local governance systems. The second is the Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD). The observatory will unify 50 local urban observatories worldwide and serve as a monitor of good urban governance and decentralization.

UNACLA, the Cities Alliance, AGRED, UCLG, the Urban Millennium Partnership and GOLD – there is a lot going on out there. Each strategic partnership offers in different ways opportunities for cities to increase their capacity to participate effectively in the fight against urban poverty.

It is within this context that I believe Sister Cities International is well placed to engage with these various initiatives and has a great deal to offer. In our experience working with SCI in the launching in the US of the World Habitat Day 2002, I came to appreciate the unique contributions of SCI since its founding 48 years ago. Coming from Africa, I am particularly impressed with the US-Africa Sister Cities that brings together – or “twins” if I have SCI language correct – 70 US cities and 80 African cities. Cross-cultural understanding among urban citizens has untold benefits that while hard to measure quantitatively, is easy to see and feel and has such meaningful long run implications. I also find effective the Resource Cities Program of SCI’s International City/Country Management Association. Attractive here is the exchange of professionals between cities for the purposes of sharing practical solutions to public service delivery issues. Pragmatic exchanges of this kind with concrete results are key.

Equally important is the emerging Network for Sustainable Development. Building on the work of the World Bank, USAID as well as the United Nations, NSD facilitates city to city exchanges that provide ordinary citizens the opportunity to act globally, and thus participate more directly in the development process. NSD clearly has a role to play in advancing the MDGs.

I look forward to exploring opportunities for future collaboration with SCI. The challenge we face assisting governments and their citizens to achieve the millennium development goals and targets is far beyond one institution or one network. It demands highly innovative and targeted forms of partnership that bring together diverse institutional cultures, societies and peoples. And, as I mentioned earlier, making good on the MDGs calls not just for strategic partnerships but also for sound principles of economic and social justice that can govern such collaboration.

Ambassador, Your worship, President Gray, Peter, distinguished guests, thank you.