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Address by Dr. Wally N'Dow Secretary-General United Nations Conference
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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II) at the

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT CAIRO, EGYPT, 9
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It is a great honour and privilege for me to address you today. This
 International Conference on Population and Development is one of those
 rare seminal moments in history, and I do not believe any of us
 fortunate enough to be a participant will ever forget it. I know I never

will. The world never will.

To President Mubarak and all our gracious hosts here in Cairo, let me say thank you for your generous hospitality. To be in this magnificent city is always a moment to treasure, and you have added to its lustre by making it the site of a conference whose impact on the future will be felt long after it ends.

Before I continue, however, I must join all those who came before me in paying tribute to the courageous and far-seeing Secretary-General of this Conference, Dr. Nafis Sadik. It would be hard for me to overstate the admiration and regard I have for her. She has set an example of dignity and grace under pressure that will be hard, if not impossible, to emulate. I am proud to be her colleague.

Today, in fact, we are all her colleagues, united in a common endeavour to redeem the Charter's promise of a better life in larger freedom for all of humanity. That was not an easy promise to fulfil when it was made nearly 50 years ago. It is no bees easy to fulfil today. If anything, it is harder.

In the post war world of the late '40's, we thought the new United Nations would lead the way to peace and a better life. But euphoric wishes were no match for the harsh reality of an East-West Cold War and a North-South divide that over the years has grown progressively wider. The Cold War is now over, but the divide remains, and its threat to the future is perhaps the greatest challenge confronting us as we stand on the threshold of a new century.

This Conference is deeply aware of the dimensions of that threat. It

knows that the peace and security that must be our ultimate goal cannot be achieved in a world in which growing numbers lack the security of a life without want. The painful tragedy of Rwanda has many causes, but would it have erupted as badly as it did if the people of that unhappy country had had the security that comes with knowing that tomorrow they will have jobs, that life while hard still offers hope, that society embraces them, that they have safe and adequate shelter?

Historically, security has always been seen in terms of protecting national boundaries and borders. But all that is changing now. The end of the Cold War has brought with it a new reality that the only true and lasting security is the one that concerns itself with the protection of people, their welfare no less than their opportunity to lead healthy and productive lives in an environment that encourages them to attain their full potential as human beings. This Conference is devoted to a major aspect of that effort, and all of us -- no matter where we come from -- have a stake in the outcome. In the final analysis, it will play a key role in shaping the security -- the human security -- of generations to come.

That is why I feel a close kinship with you, why in coming here to speak to you today in my capacity as Secretary-General of HABITAT II, I take what I see as the first long step on a road on which I have embarked. It is the road leading to Istanbul where the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements will be held little less than two years from now in June 1996. And there is no question in my mind that what you do here in Cairo -- the decisions you make, the issues you deal with -- are intimately interrelated with the decisions we will make and the issues we will deal with in Istanbul.

The road to Istanbul actually started two years ago in Rio at the

International Conference on Environment and Development; from here it goes to Copenhagen and the World Summit for Social Development next March, then to Beijing and the World Conference on Women in September, and it winds up in Istanbul with HABITAT II.

This unprecedented continuum of conferences, just before and after the U.N.'s 50th anniversary, spans some of the most serious and pressing problems of human security that will confront the UN and the world community in the new century. Cumulatively, those already held and those still to be held, have begun to deliver a more holistic and humane message about our global problems and about the cooperative solutions they require.

It is appropriate, I think, that HABITAT II will be the final conference in this remarkable series, for it is in the cities and towns of the new urban world now exploding all around us that the majority of the world's population will live and work, where the most pollution will be generated and natural resources consumed, where political and social conditions are most likely to boil over into conflict, and where, ultimately, the roots of real global security - true human security - lie.

The questions you discuss here in Cairo have considerable implications for this new urban world. Indeed, we have only just begun to understand the complex and potentially explosive political, economic, social and psychological issues inherent in teeming, overcrowded cities that are growing larger and faster today than ever before dreamed possible. There are those who now maintain that the future of the city will determine the future of the world. But whether it does or it does not, it is already clear that when we cross the threshold of the new urban world in

the next few years, we will find ourselves in largely unexplored territory. Ironically, we will know more about the distant planets of outer space than about the burgeoning cities down here on our own planet earth.

The danger of this is that we have run out of time in which to learn. We have to act now -- today -- because in just a few more years, soon after the 21st century passes its first quarter, the cities of the third world will be the overcrowded, congested home of nearly four billion people. They will largely be the poor, the homeless, the pavement dwellers, and all the multitudes trapped in inadequate shelter and depressing slums and shantytowns. And the grim forecast is that when the century ends there will be more people compressed into these teeming urban areas than are alive on the entire planet today. They have been called the inadvertent, accidental pioneers of our new urban world, a world that to them is without security or even hope.

I do not want to assault you with statistics. But magnitudes of population mean little without an understanding of the myriad ways in which people, as individuals and as communities, affect the earth for better or for worse. That is why today's astonishing urban growth underscores the urgency we lend to our population problems. We see the number of giant cities with 5, 10, 15, 20 million and more people, and intuitively we know that poverty, population, depletion of resources, and increasing civil unrest are somehow related to their size. For many, they are black holes that now swallow the best of our youth, our cultural traditions, and our natural resources. There is a common belief that if only we could stifle the flow of people from the countryside, the cities themselves might take on a benevolent vitality and a more human dimension.

But measure that belief against the reality that, as one report puts it, today one fifth of all human beings (about 1.4 billion people) live in absolute poverty without adequate food, clothing and shelter. Some 1.3 billion live in developing countries, most of them (about one billion) in rural areas. This situation, however, is fast changing as more and more people head to the cities in what has been called the greatest migration in history. Although there are still uncertainties on the exact year when the urban poor will outnumber the rural poor, the trend is clear: Not only are we living in an increasingly urbanized world, we are also experiencing an urbanization of poverty -- and going hand in hand with that is the great strain -- all too often to the breaking point -- on home and the family, and the feminization of poverty. Indeed, as we are seeing more and more, it is women who suffer the most and who have the worst shelter. If there were no other reason to focus our attention on them, that would be enough.

Unless this 20th century urban agenda is addressed with the urgency and attention it demands, the consequences may well engulf the new century in a vast array of domestic and international problems -- problems we mostly talk about without really solving. I have talked about some. Let me repeat them and add others: increasing urban poverty; homelessness or substandard housing; unemployment and alienation among the young; ethnic tension; violence; a decaying urban infrastructure; social disintegration; land degradation; traffic congestion; air, water, and noise pollution; lack of adequate educational and training facilities; and epidemics ranging from old plagues such as tuberculosis to new ones such as AIDS. And I cite here just a few on an ever-expanding list of pressing issues already being faced in virtually every city in rich country and poor country alike. In short, our human settlements crisis threatens the security not only of the billion and more who are homeless

or trapped in inadequate shelter, but each and every one of us. No one is left untouched.

The inescapable fact is that no matter what our country, our cities are not working. It is equally clear, as it has been for a long time now, that conditions in our rural areas continue to deteriorate and with that deterioration, both urban and rural, comes the added threat of a new division between rich and poor, within and between nations.

This division may well be the new polarity that characterizes the dawning era of our global urban civilization. If such a polarization does indeed become the dominant characteristic of the new world order -- and we should make no mistake about it -- it will bring about a future at least as dangerous as the period of East-West rivalry the world has just recently left behind.

The overall objective of the HABITAT II Conference is twofold: one is to increase the world's awareness of the problems I have cited here, and a second is to awaken it to the potentials of human settlements as important inputs to social progress and economic growth. Our aim is to convince the world's leaders that our cities, towns and villages need to be healthy, safe, just and sustainable. The fundamental goal is to prepare the international community for life on an urbanized planet. For too long have we talked about this in platitudes and, at times in cliches. For example, a traffic paralyzed city street is often more the subject of a popular cartoon than it is for serious legislative action to tackle the cause. As one famous cartoon character of bygone years said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!"

But every journey must have a start. For U9 the start, the first step, must be in our own house, and here the strong acknowledgment of the

population-human settlements nexus in the programmes of action being proposed for this Conference today and for HABITAT II tomorrow -- and in many ways as it was for the Rio Conference yesterday -- must be our roadmap. Indeed, the objectives of both the ICPD and HABITAT II coincide in their underlying rationale that the minimum needs of human society, however populous, have to be met in terms of adequate food supply, shelter, clothing, drinking water, energy, sanitation, employment, basic education and health care, and that any people-centred development must follow a model that will ensure the provision of these fundamental requirements.

Given the similarity of our objectives, there is no doubt in my mind that several of the actions being proposed here for various elements of the ICPD, could also be adapted and woven into the HABITAT II Programme of Action. This is most particularly relevant in such issues as population distribution and urbanization; gender equality and empowerment of women; internal migration; population and environment; interrelationship between population, sustained economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development; population information, education and communication; technology, research and development; international cooperation; resource mobilization and allocation; and follow-up strategies and mechanisms at both the national and international levels. And it takes little prescience on my part to envisage that the statement of principles of this ICPD and that of HABITAT II will be mutually supportive.

In view of the close inter-relationships that exist between us, it is needless to say that implementation of the final programmes of Action of the ICPD and HABITAT II could provide a wide scope for greater collaboration between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). To my mind, it is inevitable that the two programmes be complementary and mutually supportive.

Moreover, in a way that goes far beyond previous population conferences, this global gathering has extended the issues of population to include those of social equity, environmental protection, and economic development. The draft program of action clearly shows that we can no longer think of population in terms of aggregate numbers without demonstrating a concern for how people - human beings - interact with one another, how they use natural resources, and how they work to better their own lives and their families' prospects for the future.

Distinguished delegates, this International Conference on Population and Development is especially important to the success of HABITAT II. I therefore look forward with keen anticipation to the conclusions and final adoption of your Programme of Action. The challenge of improving the quality of life for all the world's people is one we all share, and meeting it will require the cooperative exchange of ideas and information across traditional administrative and sectoral boundaries.

As never before it will also require new thinking and new directions as the rush to the city goes on; as cities in the industrialized countries continue to produce massive, uncontrolled amounts of waste and pollutants; as cities in the developing countries, filling beyond capacity and sprawling, more often than not follow in the same dangerous footsteps.

I am indebted to a pioneering report on the urban explosion put out by UNFPA that graphically described a close-up satellite picture of the earth as looking, conversely, like a view from down here into the

depths of outer space, with the stars, nebulae and galaxies making up the cities -- urban constellations, as it were -- glowing brilliantly against a deep, dark background. It is an image whose brightness suggests the importance of cities shining as centres of human attraction, intellectual light, and economic power.

But then there is the dark background in the picture -- the blackness - - surrounding the cities, and this in turn suggests the terrible darkness formed by the dehumanizing slums and shantytowns, by the shameful poverty, the inequality, the discrimination that now pervade the urban ghettos of the world. This is the battleground on which you here in Cairo today and that we in Istanbul tomorrow are joined in common cause.

We must go forward together. The way ahead is hard, but it is clear: As we try to stem the population growth rates, we improve conditions of life, we ease pressure on resources, we manage better urban growth, and we ensure that ,we evolve constructive policies of sustainable development in a world in which human security will finally redeem the Charter's promise of better life in larger freedom.

"It may not be easy," your distinguished Secretary-General has said, "but it is the only way if we are to pass on to our children a world that is both urban and viable, that can sustain great numbers of people in peace and prosperity and in harmony with the environment that supports them."

I can think of no more fitting words with which to close. Thank you.

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