

3 October 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Habitat Day**

Excellencies,
Her Excellency Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Ms. Cecilia Martínez, Director, UN-Habitat New York Office
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Every year on the first Monday of October, we celebrate World Habitat Day.

We come together on this occasion to reflect on the state of the world's cities, and to reaffirm our collective responsibility to protect the future of the human habitat.

The theme of this year's observance is "Cities and Climate Change".

With more than half of humanity living in urban areas, unsustainable demands are being placed on our resources and the environment. High energy consumption and the emission of greenhouse gases from cities, in particular, are straining our climate.

The effects of this pressure are being felt - quite literally felt- around the world. Consider the increased frequency of heat waves and extreme storms. Growing water scarcity. More frequent and intensive droughts and inland floods.

Whilst coastal cities in developed and developing countries are amongst the most vulnerable in this respect, it is clear that developing countries are hit the hardest.

This impacts their overall development, including their ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. And as is so often the case, it is vulnerable groups and women who suffer the most.

At the same time, we have before us an opportunity: an opportunity to build new approaches for relieving pressure on ecosystems and human habitat.

Cities are centres of innovation. Contained in their urban sprawl is a rich tapestry of people, industries, knowledge, culture and infrastructure. Cities are often best placed to provide creative solutions to sustainable development. One important area of attention is mitigation strategies that, when adopted by cities, can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help to decrease the magnitude and impact of existing and future changes. Creating more low-carbon cities is a worthwhile goal in this respect.

However, climate change will not be prevented altogether. Thus, effective adaptation strategies must be designed and implemented, to ensure that cities become more resilient to climate risks. We have seen comprehensive climate change action plans emerging from a number of major cities, and I call upon Member States and their partners to consider scaling these up.

If we plan for climate change today, it will be less expensive than rebuilding an entire network after a catastrophe.

As President of the General Assembly, I am deeply committed to supporting Member States as they tackle these major issues of climate change and sustainable development. The upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development- Rio+20- provides an important platform for advancing and recommitting to sustainable development.

But governments alone cannot tackle these enormous challenges. When the public sector at all levels joins forces with civil society- including the private sector- innovation and implementation can flourish.

Let us pledge to join our efforts to make better cities for a better future for all mankind.

I wish you a very successful event.