

Nairobi, June 24, 2009

Dear Sir/Madam,

In a tradition dating back to 1985, the United Nations celebrates World Habitat Day on the first Monday in October each year to reflect on the state of human settlements and the basic right to adequate shelter for all. It is also intended to alert the world on its collective responsibility for the future of the human habitat.

For this year's celebrations, the United Nations chose the theme Planning our urban future to raise awareness of the need to improve urban planning to deal with new major challenges of the 21st century. This is because urban settlements in all parts of the world are being influenced by new and powerful forces. In both developed and developing countries, cities and towns are increasingly feeling the effects of climate change, resource depletion, food insecurity, population growth and economic instability. These factors will significantly reshape towns and cities, physically and socially, in the century ahead. With over half of the world's population currently living in urban areas, and this number set to rise to two-thirds in another generation, there is no doubt that the 'urban agenda' is becoming a global priority.

This is why planning our urban future needs to be given a fresh focus and highlighted on World Habitat Day 2009. After all, we know the problems, but we need to share the best solutions as efficiently and widely as possible by planning better and more sensitively for ourselves and our environment.

I am delighted to inform you that the Administration of President Obama will host the Global Observance of this year's World Habitat Day in Washington, D.C. This reinforces UN-HABITAT's long relationship with the United States. The long-standing commitment of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to affordable housing and sustainable urbanization is shown by the seminal role it played in Habitat II, in Istanbul, Turkey, in June 1996, the Istanbul+5 special review session of the general Assembly in 2001, and sessions of the World Urban Forum.

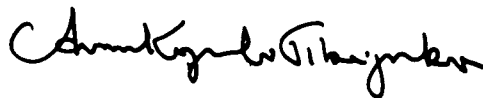
World Habitat Day celebrations in Washington, D.C. come at a time when the United States has increased financial support to the general programmes of UN-HABITAT and for housing and urban development projects in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan and Sri Lanka and for the Palestinian people. The celebrations in the United States also highlight significant cooperation with US corporations, private foundations, mayors, and non governmental organizations.

The Global Observance of World Habitat Day always includes the presentation of the Scroll of Honour awards. The most prestigious human settlements award in the world, its aim is to acknowledge outstanding contributions towards improving human settlements and sustainable urban development. Since its launch in 1989, more than 110 recipients have been honoured. We invite you to nominate a best practice for consideration for the Scroll of Honour award. Please find guidelines on our website at www.unhabitat.org/whd. The deadline for Scroll of Honour submissions is 15 August 2009. The World Habitat Awards by the UK-based Building and Social Housing Foundation will also be presented on this day.

I am pleased to report that last year, some 50 countries around the world held events commemorating World Habitat Day. I would like to thank you for this support and invite you again to celebrate World Habitat Day with us this year to raise awareness of the challenges that we need to address to improve human settlements worldwide. We hope you will find the attached guidelines on organizing country and city level activities useful. We kindly ask you to nominate a World Habitat Day representative with whom we can liaise to support your celebrations. A special e-mail address <whd@unhabitat.org> has been set up so that we can respond quickly to any queries.

We look forward to you celebrating this important event with us, either at the Global Observance in the United States or in your home country.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Tibaijuka', written in a cursive style.

Anna Tibaijuka
Under-Secretary-General and
Executive Director