

UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

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Commission on Human Settlements

Remarks by
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Delivered by
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UNITED NATIONS
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE
United Nations Human Settlements Programme

The third session of the
Commission on the Status of Women

Presented by
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Delivered by
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Honorable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and deeply honored to address the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. This is a historical moment as the world marks the memorable occasion of the launch of UN Women. I bring to you greetings from Dr. Louisa Chou, the newly appointed UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

It is fitting to consider education, science and technology together in one session as these are critical and interdependent pillars of development. Education is the backbone for the advancement of humanity and in an ideal world every man, woman and child should have access to quality education. Regrettably, even where governments have adopted measures to ensure universal primary and secondary education, not all girls are in school both in rural and urban areas.

The rapid pace of information and technological revolution, and market's forces have not been recorded in science. More people are living longer as a result of advances in medicine. The internet and mobile phones are changing the way we connect and do business across the globe. Suffice to note that many of these scientific and technological changes are hatched and nurtured in cities around the world.

The information and technology revolution is a double-edged sword. It offers many opportunities for young people, girls and boys, but so are the challenges. As identified in the *Human Development Report 2010: Because I am a Girl: Digital and Urban Futures*, "Cities in a Changing Landscape".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many young women and men are on the move from the rural to urban areas, in search of a better life. In many countries, the main hope of benefiting from the urban advantage – better infrastructure and basic services – schools, health care, electricity, water, transport, energy and housing, employment opportunities and decent work. However, many find themselves settling in informal settlements and slums which lack basic services and infrastructure.

In some slums, the schools are overcrowded with few teachers and not enough school materials and basic facilities. A UN-HABITAT study in 17 African cities established that many slum schools had unsafe toilets and this contributed to the school drop-out rates, especially those at puberty. Other factors affecting girls' education include gender inequality and security in public spaces, especially in providing transport as girls travel to school.

It is estimated that there are over 100 million street children globally, and that 30 per cent of these children are girls who have to endure harsh living conditions and temptations of street life. While boys are often involved in crime, some street girls use their bodies to survive by selling sex.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need a multi-pronged approach in responding to gender issues in education, science and technology. Our efforts should permeate Schools of Science and Engineering and centers of technological innovation. We should also establish special measures to increase the number of girls' educational enrollment in science and technology in particular.

My dear friends, I would like to urge the Commission on the Status of Women and to UN Women to pay greater attention to the impact of rapid urbanization and urban poverty in developing countries on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It is imperative that we respond to the current demographic shifts and address the plight of poor urban women and the most vulnerable in cities, such as the homeless and street children, migrant women and the urban poor, women working in the informal sector including street vendors, and slum dwellers.

I would like to urge distinguished delegates to the Commission on the Status of Women to consider how to creatively address the needs of women in cities. I would like to urge you to creatively think about how UN-Women can develop an urban dimension to its thematic priority areas. Specifically, I would like to see an emphasis on land use and urban design as a strategy for economic empowerment, urban safety as a strategy for women's peace and security, and ending violence against women by planning cities with women in mind including the systems of land use and urban design that prevent violence which occur in public spaces. Further, I would encourage ways to incorporate gender budgeting practices and related urban management strategies in the thematic area of women's leadership and political participation. By targeting cities and local authorities, UN Women can ensure that their efforts to prevent violence against women and empower women are visible and felt by the local authorities and the people.

It is my firm belief that in the not-so-distant future, the Commission on the Status of Women will dedicate a special focus on urbanization with emphasis on women living in slums and informal settlements.

Thank you.