

Excellencies,
Honorable Mayors,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am honored to chair the opening session of the Forum on “Sustainable Urbanization in the Information Age”. I am also happy that this forum coincides with Earth Week, when we can further reflect on our common responsibilities for the protection of environment. As the Permanent Representative of Turkey which hosted the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) back in 1996, I must underline that the commitments, recommendations, and the main thrust contained in Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements are still valid today.

We live in an urbanizing world. It cannot be denied that we are all attracted to the charms of the big cities. Being hubs for civilizations and culture and with their unquestionable potential, they are expected to offer employment, shelter, stability, prosperity, security, social inclusion and more equitable access to the services. All these would make our lives safer, healthier, sustainable and more convenient. Yet, I am afraid, this is not the case.

We are all aware and feel in various degrees the adverse effects of mismanaged urbanization in our daily lives. These negative effects of rapid yet unplanned urbanization are amplified in the developing countries as

they lack of adequate resources, basic infrastructure, services and well-conceived planning to redress problems stemming from poverty, homelessness, increasing violence and social exclusion. Climate change and tight-link between urban population growth and environmental degradation also pose a daunting challenge that we must address both collectively and decisively. And we should not forget that sustainable urbanization is indeed an MDG related issue and the challenges posed by it will have a direct bearing on our success to attain the MDGs by 2015.

For sure, the magnitude and the nature of these problems differ from city to city, from country to country. Though they are not uniform we have to recognize that pertaining solutions do have common denominators on which we should all focus. That is the only way to further develop strategies that can be applied according to our differentiated responsibilities and necessities. This requires a comprehensive approach harnessing the efforts of governments, international organizations, civil society and private sector. Fortunately, the benefits of globalization and the rapidly developing communication technology make this task less difficult. I believe that this Forum will contribute to this end by providing an opportunity to share our experiences, best practices and possibly our past shortcomings.

As I do not want to take much of your time I now give the floor to Mr.---. Mr. --- you have the floor.