

Address by Minister Duclos - Opening Plenary - Habitat III Global Summit

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Madame President of the Conference, heads of delegations and delegates,
distinguished guests

On behalf of Canada, thank you for the opportunity to participate at the Habitat III Summit.

It is an honour to bring Canada's voice to the international conversation about building a safe, inclusive, sustainable and prosperous world.

Yesterday marked the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. This important day calls on all of us to end poverty in all forms across the globe.

The Government of Canada is committed to reducing poverty and improving the economic well-being of all Canadian families so they can have a real and fair chance to succeed. To demonstrate this commitment, we recently introduced a simpler and more equitable Canada Child Benefit that will result in a reduction of about 40% in overall child poverty, leading to the lowest level of child poverty ever seen in our nation. We are also opening a dialogue with interested Canadians in order to build the first ever National Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Let me say that discussions surrounding Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda could not be more timely.

Across the globe, we are faced with ongoing instability and fear. We are confronted with issues of extreme poverty, forced displacement, gender inequality, environmental degradation and climate change.

These challenges are further compounded by the fact that over half of the world's population is now living in cities.

It comes as no surprise that issues like exclusion, inequality and poverty are magnified in urban centres with high population densities.

And Canada is no exception.

Too many young families are struggling to get by—let alone save for retirement.

Too many single mothers are living paycheque to paycheque and are forced to live in unsafe neighborhoods just to provide shelter for their children.

Too many young Canadians are frustrated because they can't find work where they live.

Too many women and girls still face inequality in the workplace and are scared to walk alone in the streets just because they are women.

Too many seniors have worked hard their whole lives, but can't find suitable housing and are forced to rely on food banks to eat.

But in Canada, we have also heard a message of hope.

As Prime Minister Trudeau said at the United Nations General Assembly last month, "Canadians still believe that progress is possible."

I imagine many other countries are hearing the same things.

We all have a role to play to make our cities more inclusive, safe, more sustainable, and economically and socially prosperous for all our families.

Partnership and collaboration are key to finding innovative solutions to address our collective challenges at home and abroad.

This is particularly true for housing, which is an important component of Canada's overall approach to strengthening the middle class, promoting inclusive growth and helping lift more people out of poverty.

Canada has launched a National Housing Strategy—the first in four decades—that will ensure that Canadians have access to housing that meets their needs and that they can afford.

That housing strategy will cover the entire housing continuum, from homelessness, to shelters, to transitional housing, to social housing, to affordable market rental housing, to home ownership.

But, housing also needs to be connected with the surrounding urban and social fabric.

This means ensuring that Canadians have access to quality jobs, child care, health care, public transit and clean water, as well as environmentally friendly, energy efficient and accessible public and private spaces.

To this end, we are making historic infrastructure investments in public transit, green infrastructure and social infrastructure to build the strong, safe, integrated cities that Canadians are proud to call home.

Above all, inclusive communities mean promoting diversity, protecting the needs of underrepresented groups and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Throughout the negotiation of the New Urban Agenda process, we fought hard to have groups like youth, women, children, immigrants, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples and members of the LGBTI community officially recognized in the New Urban Agenda.

I'm proud to say that most of these groups are indeed recognized.

Unfortunately, the LGBTI community has been left out up to this point.

We will continue to advocate for the rights of that community, both at home and abroad, in a respectful but determined manner.

To this end, I call on all member states to ensure, as they implement the New Urban Agenda at home, that they leave no one behind, including the LGBTI community. It is time to end violence and discrimination in our communities that target individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

In Canada, we view diversity as a source of strength and pride. In this regard, we will continue to promote measures that strengthen inclusion, intercultural dialogue, understanding, respect and tolerance, pluralism and peaceful coexistence.

The Habitat III guiding principles—leaving no one behind, ensuring sustainable and inclusive development for all and promoting the development of strong ecological cities—are an excellent starting point.

Canada embraces all these principles. They are important to Canada at home, and they are important here in Quito as well.

This year has seen Canada reengage with the international community. I look forward to continued partnership with the United Nations well beyond this summit.

Canada has a meaningful contribution to make. We are there to help. We look forward to sharing our experiences and learning from other countries that are grappling with issues similar to our own.

Together, we can transform our national visions into a global vision, and make that vision a reality.

Thank you.