



Statement @ Opening Plenary Session UN - HABITAT III

Quito, 17 October 2016

Prof. Assoc. Mrs. Eglantina Gjermeni,

Minister of Urban Development, Republic of Albania

Dear Chairman,

Honorable Excellency's,

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

On behalf of Government of Albania I have the honor to address this Plenary Session of Habitat III.

It is a special occasion also for me personally, to represent my country in a global event, which happens to be organized only once in 20 years.

The New Urban Agenda that we will all discuss upon and commit politically, is not just a set of objectives, but most importantly is a joint vision that will lead our countries towards sustainable development.

This universal engagement that sets our priorities in medium and long term requires political decision-making, as well as an effective platform that addresses people's needs and interests. "Leave no One Behind" is a philosophy that we all agree, that inspires our actions towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

Coming from a social background and as a gender activist, I see this New Urban Agenda as a comprehensive guidance for all our countries to reduce poverty, ensure gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, promote inclusive societies, improve human health and well-being, as well as stimulate economic growth and protect environment.

In the framework of the implementation of this New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Government of Albania in 2014 undertook the Territorial Administrative Reform, which reduced the number of municipalities from three hundred seventy four, to sixty one.

Parallel to this process, the Ministry of Urban Development designed and recently approved the General National Territorial Plan “Albania 2030”, which represents our vision for sustainable development in the next fifteen years.

Following the implementation of the territorial administrative reform, the Government also took the initiative to support local authorities in drafting spatial plans for the new municipalities, to leverage the key role of cities and human settlements as drivers of sustainable development in both, urban and rural areas.

Urban Renaissance is another governmental program that has taken place in Albania in the recent years, with the aim for the redevelopment of city centers and neighborhoods. Through Urban Renaissance we are trying to transform the physiognomy of our cities, by using innovative strategies that stimulate economic and social improvement. It is an approach that step by step will improve the urban context and affect people's quality of life.

Additionally, informality, regional disparities and inequalities in Albania, are issues that our Government is trying to address also through several interventions, but they still remain evident affecting communities and their standard of living.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Urban Development is addressing the housing, not only as an objective, but as a human right issue. With the support of the United Nations in Albania, we have prepared a National Housing Strategy, and we are currently

finalizing a new law on social housing. Both these documents would increase the opportunities of Albanian citizens to have access to affordable housing and improve their quality of life.

All these processes and initiatives that I shortly mentioned, have in a common the participatory approach through intensive consultations with all the stakeholders, including: local and central government, academia, businesses, civil society and citizens. This good practice built so far, will be further consolidated in the next steps of the New Urban Agenda implementation, and guarantee a wider contribution and ownership from all the actors.

Your Excellency's,

Albania is a small country with a big aspiration to be a member of the European Union, sharing our values, history and cultural heritage, as well as religious harmony. But we are still aware of the complex challenges that lie ahead of us, therefore,

we are strongly committed to continue our reforms and further provide transformation and progress for the Albanian citizens.

Going back 40 years, in the light of the Vancouver Habitat I Conference, I would conclude this statement with a message given by Mother Theresa, a famous Albanian humanitarian, that poverty does not only have to do with being poor or hungry, but also being uncared and left behind.

Mother Theresa's message is still actual, which means that our mission is not accomplished yet. That's why this New Urban Agenda is imperative to be implemented by all of us.

We owe this to our children!

Thank you,