

Plenary Statement Pascal Smet  
Head of Belgian delegation  
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Mr president

Distinguished Secretary-General, Under-secretary, Ministers, Excelences,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of Belgium, I would like to extend our gratitude to Ecuador and the city of Quito for hosting the Habitat III conference. We salute the efforts of all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, in the long, sometimes difficult, but eventually fruitful trajectory up to the New Urban Agenda.

Belgium welcomes the new urban agenda as an important guideline for the coming years to deal with the further urbanisation of our planet.

As a EU member state and host country of the capital of the European Union – Brussels - we of course endorse the statement made by the European Union.

As you know, a couple of months ago, Brussels was the target of a brutal attack of international terrorism on our airport and on a subway station. These events provoked a lot of human loss and tragedy.

But the people of Brussels showed what cities are all about. There was sorrow, anger and confusion but very soon the people of Brussels took their life back and sent a clear message: a message of hope, embracing diversity and a true understanding that living together in a city with respect for each other is the only way to proceed. Brussels is a vibrant and diverse city, a lovely place to live, work and raise kids. As a city we will never surrender, as no city should ever do.

Many crucial themes are addressed in the New Urban Agenda. Let me stress four items that are of particular importance for Belgium.

First of all: cities should be authors of their own future. Only by strengthening the participation of local and regional authorities, and of citizens, in the urban decision-making we can guarantee the strong governance necessary for

implementing the New Urban Agenda. All levels of government need to recognize cities as engines of progress, as hubs for creativity, as centers for citizen participation, and as drivers for inclusion. This recognition must be matched by the allocation of the necessary tools to those authorities working on the scale of the city.

Secondly: A city will be inclusive or will not be. At a time where we see wide gaps between rich and poor, all cities should strive to become more inclusive. “Just cities”, where everybody has an equal opportunity to study, work and live. Where everybody has a home. Homelessness is a shame, especially in European cities. Cities where everybody can live in peace.

Thirdly: Cities should be open. The core essence of city is the interaction between people. People with different opinions, beliefs and orientations. Through this interaction, creativity and innovation is born. Cities should welcome this and also be open to people fleeing human made or climate made disasters and persecutions. But solidarity is necessary between all countries and within all countries to facilitate the integration of new-comers.

Finally: Cities should be for people. And no longer for cars. Public space is essential in cities. People should have space to meet, interact and do so without the noise, pollution and stress of cars. Probably the era of the car is coming to an end in cities of the next generation.

Sustainable mobility and accessibility will be at the core of urban planning. The quality of air in cities is essential for their survival. Climate change will also be resolved through good city planning. I therefore praise the New Urban Agenda for making a clear choice to prioritize public transport, walking and cycling, over private motorized transportation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are looking forward in working together to work on our new urban agenda. It will not be easy, it should be concrete and all UN institutions should be embracing this agenda.

Life in a city, should be like living a dream. For too many of us it's still not a dream but harsh reality. Let's work together to make city-life wonderful for all human beings.

Thank u

