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**UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

**HABITAT III**

**QUITO, ECUADOR**

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**PLENARY STATEMENT**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished colleagues

It is my pleasure to represent the International Telecommunication Union – the UN agency that has focused on connecting the world through information and communication technologies (ICTs) for more than 150 years.

ICTs, powered by broadband networks are critical enablers of the three pillars of sustainable development – economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

With the rapid growth of urban areas, and the unprecedented challenges of urbanization, broadband driven networks will be essential to the success of the **New Urban Agenda**.

Fortunately, there is a growing body of research to confirm this.

ICTs and the internet can help to end poverty in all its forms and dimensions, achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, enhance education, improve our health and well-being, foster innovation and protect the environment.

While it is true you can't eat a cell phone – ICT driven broadband networks create sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, in both urban and rural areas.

In rural areas they can act as a brake on migration to towns and cities – by bringing sought after urban opportunities and empowerment to the most remote areas of a country.

We are very pleased that the New Urban Agenda recognizes the need to adopt a Smart Sustainable approach to urbanization.

But what is a smart sustainable city?

It is an innovative city that uses ICTs to improve the quality of life, efficiency of urban operations and services.

By tapping into ICT driven innovations, a smart city promotes participation of **ALL** of its citizens at **ALL** stages of urban policy development and design.

To do this however; we must also embrace Target 9c of the Sustainable Development Agenda – which calls for universal and affordable access to the internet by 2020.

Today less than half of the world has access to the internet, less than one-third in developing world and far fewer in the least developed countries. Right now, there are 200 million fewer women online than men.

The achievement of this **keystone SDG** target – universal and affordable access to the internet - will be critical for achieving sustainable urban development to ensure that no one - be they an urban or rural citizen - is left behind.

We urge Member States to capitalize on the benefits of broadband for achieving the commitments of the New Urban Agenda. .

However, we caution that it will take a sustained multi-stakeholder partnership – public, private and civil society - to close the technological divide and to accelerate the digital and data revolution for sustainable urban development.

We leave Quito optimistic that these challenges will be overcome, as a new generation of urban planners and policy makers. Young professionals – born, raised and educated as ‘digital natives’ in our inter-connected world - take responsibility for the New Urban Agenda, which ITU is honored to support.

Thank you for your attention.