



STATEMENT BY MR. RAGHUNATH JHA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 54: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS [HABITAT II] AND STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME [UN-HABITAT] AT THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 26, 2006

Madam Chairperson,

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the agenda item "Implementation of the Outcome of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and Strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme". We associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77.

Madam Chairperson,

International initiatives on human settlements reflect the concern for the manifold problems facing human settlements as well as our collective commitment to resolve them. At the Millennium Summit, we collectively resolved to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020. Some striking statistics have been provided in the report of the Secretary-General. By 2007, more people will live in cities than in rural areas for the first time in human history. The emerging trends would have a profound effect on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The 21st century will increasingly be an urban world and our well-being would depend upon the manner in which the problems of urban poverty, pollution, planning and infrastructure are tackled. It is no coincidence that the 2005 World Summit recognized the urgent need of increased resources for affordable housing and infrastructure, prioritising slum upgrading and slum prevention.

India recognises that the problem of shelter is closely linked to the eradication of poverty and that policy on Habitat has to have a very strong pro-

poor focus. The National Housing and Habitat Policy of 1998 of the Government of India recognises housing not merely as a physical asset but in the context of the overall sustainable living habitat. It highlights the need for adequate infrastructure, including social infrastructure, and the role of cooperative and corporate sectors. India seeks to achieve the target of 'Housing for All' through a facilitating approach by the end of the 10th Five Year Plan [2007].

Madam Chairperson,

Poverty in both urban and rural areas continues to be one of the major developmental concerns for many developing countries. Moreover, providing infrastructure support in both urban and rural areas, so critical for addressing problems associated with human settlements, continues to be a major challenge. These include services of power, water supply, transport, sewerage, solid waste disposal etc. It is important for the developing countries that they are provided with financial and technical assistance in their efforts to eradicate poverty in both urban and rural areas through generation of productive employment, creation of durable economic infrastructure and food security.

The large and increasing urban population does indeed point to an immediate shortage of shelter and associated infrastructure and the growth of slums. India has initiated substantial work to upgrade urban infrastructure. The repeal of the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, 1976 has been a significant step towards reform in the urban land market. India recognizes that the need to ease the availability of urban land so that land prices are reduced to make shelter affordable for poor. However, the proliferation of slums is a major concern. The Draft National slum Policy recognizes that 'slums are an integral part of urban areas and contribute to their economy' and endorses 'an upgrading and improvement approach in all slums, rather than slum clearance, except under strict guidelines'. The 'Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana' aims at providing shelter for poor slums dwellers.

Several policies and programmes of the Government of India have a thrust to improve employment and livelihood opportunities in rural areas. The integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was started in 1978-79, for providing assistance to rural poor in the form of subsidy and bank credit. The IRDP and some other allied programmes were merged into a single programme – the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarazgor Yojna (Golden Jubilee Village Self-Employment Plan) in 1999. The Programme emphasizes micro-enterprise development in rural areas, with emphasis on organizing the rural poor into self-help groups, capacity-building, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure development, technology, credit and marketing linkages. Jawahar Rozgar Yojna [Jawahar Employment Plan] had been one of the other important wage

employment schemes for rural areas. This has now been merged with the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. It aims at generating employment opportunities through creation of economic infrastructure and community and social assets. The 'Indira Awaas Yojna', launched in 1985, aims at reaching out to rural poor with grant-in-aid for construction and upgrading of temporary houses.

Madam Chairperson,

International cooperation to provide financial and technical assistance, including transfer of technology, should receive our highest priority if the developing countries are to achieve the target we all agreed to at the Millennium Summit. In the spirit of South-South solidarity, India has shared and is willing to continue sharing appropriate technology, particularly in the field of cost-effective, environment friendly and disaster-resistant construction.

Madam Chairperson,

India is supportive of efforts to strengthen the UN - Habitat to enable it to effectively fulfill its mandate by providing non-earmarked, predictable funding and regular budget resources for its own programme activities. The UN Habitat should focus on operational work through field projects in developing countries and should continue to coordinate with multilateral and regional financial and development institutions for the implementation of joint projects and programmes in the area of human settlements.

While concluding I wish to inform that India is privileged to host the First Asia-Pacific ministerial conference on housing and urban development in cooperation with UN-Habitat in December this year. The conference is expected to identify strategies for turning the urbanization challenge into an opportunity for development.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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