

Statement By H.E. Lyonpo Om Pradhan
Chairman Of The Delegation Of The Kingdom Of Bhutan To The Twenty Fifth Special Session Of The General
Assembly For An Overall Review And Appraisal Of The Implementation Of The Habitat Agenda, New York, 6-8 June
2001

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

As speakers before me have stressed, the challenges of "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable urban development" have intensified since the Istanbul Conference. Globalization has fueled urbanization at a rapid pace. Many governments and cities face enormous pressure to provide even basic services to ever increasing urban populations.

This Special Session affords us an important opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made so far in implementing the Habitat Agenda, as well as to evaluate the obstacles that have been encountered, and to consider a viable course of action.

Mr. President,

Shelter is obviously one of the most basic of human needs. Hence, it is important that governments and the international community continue to accord human settlements a high priority.

In this context, it is pertinent to mention that the challenges of human settlements are compounded not only by rural to urban migrations within national boundaries, but also due to trans-border migrations, sometimes on a massive scale, of destitute people in search of better livelihoods and living space. This is a prominent feature in our region of South Asia, where one fifth of the world's population live, and where poverty is rampant. Therefore, it is imperative that in order to implement the Habitat Agenda successfully, national efforts must be complemented by international cooperation.

One of the main constraints in implementing the Habitat Agenda in the developing countries, and more so in the least developed among them, is the lack of technical knowhow and other resources. This problem has to be addressed seriously, in the context of both Official Development Assistance and concessional financing mechanisms. The International Conference on Financing for Development to be held next year in Mexico will have a good opportunity to look at this issue.

Mr. President,

As far as my country Bhutan is concerned, 20% of our population live in urban areas. However, it is expected that within the next two decades, our urban population will increase to over 50%, making it a big challenge for a small country like ours.

The government's objective is to " achieve a balanced and sustainable development of human settlements, provision of basic infrastructure, conservation of environmental character and culture, and provision of affordable and climatically suitable housing for all."

In keeping with our people-centered socioeconomic development policies, the government provides assistance to all house owners, especially in the rural areas, by way of subsidized timber and group fire insurance. Every possible effort is being made to ensure sanitation and water supply and where feasible, provision of electricity. Furthermore, in order to overcome the shortage of housing in urban areas, the government and financial institutions have joined hands to create appropriate affordable housing, wherever feasible.

Mr. President,

One of the key national policy objectives that we have been implementing over the last 25 years is decentralization, which takes socioeconomic activities right down to the town and village levels. This process has had a positive impact on environmental management, housing, sanitation, water supply, electricity, health and education facilities. It is in this context and to ensure that urban planning caters to an expanding population that the Municipal Act 1999 was also passed by our National Assembly.

In order to give further impetus to human settlements, and improve sustainability of urban services, Bhutan has established the National Committee on Human Settlements to look after all aspects in this regard.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, my delegation is confident that given the national and international will and cooperation, our work here at this Special Session will contribute to making our world a better place for all.

Thank you.