

STATEMENT BY MR. VIJAY RAMNIKLAL RUPANI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND
MEMBER OF THE INDAIN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 54 –
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE 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 64TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL
ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 04, 2009



Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Secretary General for the report on the agenda item under consideration today. We would like to associate ourselves with the statement made by the Chair of the Group of 77.

Mr. Chairman,

India attaches great importance to the issue of affordable housing. This topic is even more relevant now in the context of the ongoing global financial and economic crisis and the consequent crunch on the availability of finance for housing in developing countries.

It is, therefore, satisfying that the special theme of the twenty second session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat held earlier this year was related to affordable housing finance systems.

We believe that many of the initiatives launched by UN-Habitat in this regard, particularly the experimental reimbursable seeding operations, have the potential to make real impact. It is important that the international community fully supports and provides financial resources to these efforts.

We are also encouraged by the recognition in the report of the Secretary-General of the broader need for proactive Government policies in the housing sector, rather than leave this sector entirely to market forces.

Public policy and regulatory frameworks can specifically cater to the needs of the poor. In this regard, permit me to highlight that the Government of India has taken several initiatives to improve housing and habitat for its population through numerous programmes, both in urban and rural areas.

The goal of "Affordable housing for all" is the overarching objective of our National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy, while promoting sustainable habitat development. A special committee has recently been set up under this Policy to collect detailed data on low-income households.

Another component of this Policy is the "Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission", which seeks to provide seven basic services to the poor, namely, land tenure, affordable shelter, water, sanitation, education, health and social security.

In rural areas, where the vast majority of our population still lives, there are programmes like the "Indira Awaas Yojana", which help in the construction

and upgradation of dwelling units for the poor by providing them a lump sum financial assistance.

We are also developing and promoting cost-effective, environment friendly and disaster resistant housing technologies for both urban and rural areas.

Mr. Chairman,

Strengthening public-private partnerships is an integral element of our housing policies. Various types of public-private partnerships are being promoted under the scheme of "Affordable Housing in Partnership".

This initiative also intends to provide economic stimulus through job creation, especially for the construction workers and other urban poor who are likely to be amongst the most vulnerable groups in recession. The initiative further targets the creation of demand for a large variety of industrial goods through the multiplier effect of housing on other economic activities.

In this context of public-private partnerships, India was happy to host the first Habitat Business Forum in New Delhi earlier this year. This event also provided an opportunity to recognize successful initiatives in the private sector in the areas like affordable land and housing, water and sanitation, green technologies and disaster preparedness.

Habitat policies can only be successful if they take a holistic approach. Promoting employment is a key element in this.

In India, schemes like the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) seeks to provide gainful employment to the urban unemployed or underemployed through the setting up of self-employment ventures or provision of wage employment.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides 100 days of employment of every rural household. Other habitat elements like sanitation are being addressed through schemes to construct low-cost sanitation units. Further, there is special emphasis on creation of economic infrastructure, and community and social assets.

We are also conscious of the need to promote sustainable habitat development. We have adopted green building codes and energy efficient transport options, among other measures. We are also encouraging greater representation of all sections of society in local authorities and expanding their functional domain to focus on environment, developing sustainable habitation, local economic development, planning, and resource mobilization.

Mr. Chairman,

South-South cooperation can play an important role in housing development. We are happy that the Governing Council of UN-Habitat has requested UN-Habitat to make use of the experience, expertise and centres of excellence existing in several countries of the South to help in the implementation of its work programme.

India has been active in sharing its experiences and know-how in the field of housing development with fellow developing countries, and we are committed to continue our efforts. We reiterate the need for the international community to provide financial resources to UN-Habitat to further facilitate South-South cooperation.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, the issue of budgetary constraints continues to be a recurring problem for UN-Habitat. It is of concern that regular budget funds represent only around seven per cent of the total UN-Habitat budget and there is a severe imbalance between earmarked and non-earmarked contributions.

We agree with the report of the Secretary-General that adequate, stable and predictable funding, preferably through multi-year financing, would enable UN-Habitat to plan effectively for the delivery of its approved work programme and the implementation of the medium-term strategic and institutional plan for the period 2008-2013. It is imperative that there be concrete progress towards this goal.

Thank you.

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