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**High-level Symposium on Sustainable Cities: Connecting People,
Environment and Technology, Co-convened by the United Nations and
Toyota City**

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Excellencies, Distinguished Mayor Ota, Distinguished guests,

I am honoured and pleased to address this opening of the High-level Symposium on Sustainable Cities: Connecting People, Environment and Technology.

[\[Sustainable Cities\]](#)

The importance of sustainable cities for a prosperous future for peoples and the planet is undisputed. In fact, it is often said that the quest of sustainable development will be won or lost in cities.

The World Urbanization Prospects 2014 produced by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs provides some staggering statistics.

Already today, more people live in urban than in rural areas. A number which will significantly increase over the coming 30 years. By 2030, the world is projected to have 41 mega-cities with more than 10 million inhabitants. Africa and

Asia are urbanizing more rapidly than the other regions of the world, and both are projected to become largely urban by 2050.

Several decades ago, most of the world's largest urban agglomerations were found in the more developed regions, but today's large cities are concentrated in the global South. The fastest growing urban agglomerations are medium-sized cities and cities with less than 1 million inhabitants located in Asia and Africa.

The continued growth is projected to add 2.5 billion more people to the world's urban population by 2050. Nearly 90 per cent of this increase projected to be concentrated in Asia and Africa. However, just three countries, India, China and Nigeria, together are expected to account for 37 per cent of this projected growth.

These are breath taking numbers.

It will require integrated policies, the use of technology and innovation and a conscious caring for the impact on our environment to improve the lives of both urban and rural dwellers.

Cities are complex, multi-dimensional and interlocking ecosystems. They consume huge amounts of goods and services such as food, water, energy, forestry, building materials and land.

It tests the capacity of local authorities, mayors, city planners and other sub-national actions who are at the front line of designing and implementing policies that affect our cities.

As an example, UN-HABITAT has estimated that the world's cities generate over 720 billion tons of waste every year. In developing regions however, only about half the waste is collected and managed. Encouraging sound waste management practices, including recycling and recovery is a worldwide challenge. The volume of municipal solid waste is expected to double annually by 2025, challenging even the most progressively managed cities. In fact, consumption and production patterns that are sustainable, including promotion of the 3R's (reduce, reuse, recycle), is a key operating principle for the development and management of sustainable cities.

Since the industrial revolution cities have been the drivers of our economic growth and prosperity. Today they generate some 80 per cent of the global GDP. This is more or less the case also in developing regions, as in Africa, where 60 per cent of the region's GDP is created in cities.

How do we deal with this challenge of absorbing so many additional dwellers into the cities, providing the necessary social services, access and mobility, housing and job opportunities, and continue to strengthen the economic capacity of the cities and urban areas while also considering the important linkages with rural development opportunities. This is the key set of challenges before us.

And these challenges are not just prevalent in the developing world. In the industrialized world, demographic change with ageing populations and low birth rates is a key concern. There are also concerns for the aging infrastructure and continued economic stagnation, increasing income disparities, social polarisation and lack of affordable housing, to name but a few.

These are all elements that contribute to an unhealthy urban system with congestion, air pollution and public health problems as a result. Indeed, cities account for over 70% of global carbon dioxide emissions from energy consumption. But per capita emissions from cities in developed countries are about 10 times more than those in cities in developing countries. Cities and towns are therefore critical to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

We shall here much more about the challenges at hand the possible ways forward during the two days of the Symposium.

[RIO+20, SDGS AND POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA]

The international community is placing a high priority on sustainable urbanisation and city development.

During the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, Member States underscored the importance of cities, stating that cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies if they are well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches.

They further emphasized the importance of implementing policies for sustainable urban planning and design in order to respond effectively to the expected urban growth patterns.

A key outcome of the Rio+20 Conference was the decision to define a set of visionary but concise, clear and well-articulated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are global in nature, while taking into account national circumstances of countries. The elaboration of the goals through the work of the intergovernmental Open Working Group has resulted in a set of 17 goals accompanied by 169 targets. They are ground-breaking, ambitious and transformational, truly interconnected in nature and for the first time linking explicitly sustainable development with peaceful and just societies.

The goals include:

1. Ending poverty;
2. Ending hunger;
3. Ensuring healthy lives;
4. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education;
5. Achieving gender equality;
6. Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation;
7. Ensuring access to affordable modern energy for all;
8. Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
9. Building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization;
- 10.Reducing inequality;
- 11.Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
- 12.Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns;

13. Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
14. Conserving and sustainably using marine resources;
15. Protecting terrestrial ecosystems;
16. Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies;
17. Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development.

Though the SDGs contain one explicit goal on sustainable cities and human settlements, Goal 11, ALL the SDGs are closely related and relevant to the city agenda.

Let me highlight a few examples:

Goal 1 contains a target 1.3: to “implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”. Social protection systems and their access are largely concentrated in the cities, where health care, subsidies and other forms of public support is made accessible. Given the increasing concentration of the poor and vulnerable in cities, the stresses will only increase demanding proactive leadership by local officials.

Goal 2 target 2.3 states that by 2030, we must double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers. This speaks to the interconnectedness of rural and urban areas. To meet the rising demand for access to adequate nutritious food in cities will require investment in rural areas.

Goal 3 speaks to the need for ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being of all at all ages. It contains a target that by 2020 halve the number of global deaths and injuries from traffic accidents. Road congestion and lack of proper infrastructure separating pedestrians from motor vehicle transport, among others, are major contributors to the high number of these accidents.

Developing public transport systems and reducing dependence on private motor vehicles will contribute to the sustainability of cities and low-carbon development, but can also indirectly contribute to reducing traffic related accidents.

Similarly, the need for access to adequate water and sanitation (goal 6), affordable and clean energy (goal 7), promoting sustainable and inclusive industrialization (goal 9) and reducing inequality (goal 10) are all critical issues amplified in cities. Sustainable development is every ones business, but here, it is particularly the business of mayors, local leaders and city planners, working closely with the private sector and civil society at large.

Member States have decided that the SDGs will form the central pillar of the United Nations post-2015 development agenda for which negotiations are currently underway, culminating with a summit level event in New York from 25-27 September 2015.

The issue of sustainable cities is firmly anchored in these discussions and will therefore be on the forefront of the worlds' priorities for the coming decades. The agenda should help frame the actions at the level of cities. Without the robust engagement of mayors and local authorities the post 2015 agenda will be empty.

[SG'S HIGH-LEVEL ADVISORY GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT]

Before concluding let me say a few words about the close link between sustainable cities and sustainable transport.

Adequate transport infrastructure and affordable transport services facilitate access to education, social services, jobs and export markets.

But safe and affordable transport services are still widely lacking in many developing countries. As increased urbanization and motorization have resulted in unprecedented congestion, wasteful energy use, increased motor vehicle emissions, road safety issues, and deteriorating urban air quality in cities, we are faced with serious negative impacts on public health, living conditions and climate change.

Transport contributes approximately one-fifth of energy-related global carbon dioxide emissions and is responsible for about one-quarter of end-use energy consumption. Under a 'Business as Usual' scenario, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions from transport activities are projected to rise by nearly 50% by 2030 and by more than 80% by 2050, from 2009 level.

Appropriate policy interventions are therefore urgently needed to support the establishment of affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound transport systems.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his Five-Year Action Agenda, responded to this challenge by pledging to forge consensus around a post-2015 sustainable development agenda and specifically on sustainable transport, decided to “convene aviation, marine, ferry, rail, road and urban public transport providers, along with Governments and investors, to develop and take action on recommendations for more sustainable transport systems that can address rising congestion and pollution worldwide, particularly in urban areas”.

The High-level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport has subsequently been established to help mobilize support among key actors to advance sustainable transport.

Clearly, sustainable transport will be a multi-sector, multi-dimension, inter-linked complex enterprise. So the aim of the Advisory Group is to promote accelerated implementation of sustainable transport, aligned closely with the objectives of inclusive and equitable growth, social development, protection of the global environment and ecosystems, and addressing climate change.

To this end, the High-level Advisory Group will work over the coming 3 years to provide a global message and recommendations on sustainable transport, including on innovative policy and multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable transport; launch a “Global Transport Outlook Report” to provide analytical support for these recommendations; and help mobilize action and initiatives in support of sustainable transport among key actors, including Member States, development finance institutions, bilateral development partners, transport providers, urban authorities and land-use planners, including through convening a global conference on sustainable transport in 2016.

I would encourage you to get engaged where the opportunities exist, share your valuable experiences and solutions as we all jointly work towards promoting sustainable cities and the associated sustainable transport systems.

I end by once again thanking Mayor Ota and Toyota City which is world famous for building a model of sustainable living. Renewable energy, efficiency and decarbonisation are evident everywhere. The energy you have brought to these efforts and your willingness to share your success with the world is the hallmark of success.

Thank you.