

**Mr. Wu Hongbo Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,
Secretary-General for the International Conference on Small Island Developing
States**

**Opening Remarks
High-level Symposium on Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urbanization**

16 December 2013, Yangzhou, China

Mr. Xie Zhengyi, Party Secretary of Yangzhou Municipal CPC Committee,
Mr. Zhu Minyang, Mayor of Yangzhou,
Honorable Minister Kasenally,
Ambassador Irene Gener-Reichl,
Ambassador Esala Teleni,
Director Woetzel,

On behalf of the United Nations, I would like to join the Yangzhou Municipal People's Government in welcoming you and all participants to this High-level Symposium on Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urbanization.

I would also like to extend the United Nations deep appreciation to the Yangzhou Municipal People's Government for its warm welcome and hospitality and support in hosting this Symposium.

This event is taking place at a time when the world is witnessing an unprecedented movement of people from rural areas to cities and other urban centers.

Already, more than half of the world's population lives in cities.

By 2030, that percentage will increase to 60 per cent.

95 per cent of urban expansion will take place in the developing world.

In China, 350 million people are expected to move into cities in the coming two decades.

Clearly, such massive changes will pose social, economic and environmental challenges, while also creating tremendous opportunities.

Many experts predict that the battle of the future sustainable development will be won and lost in cities.

I share that assessment.

It will be critical to achieving the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals – whether we will be able to usher in a new era of cities and a new track of sustainable urbanization.

However, I would like to put the focus on now, on today, the present, and not 20 or 30 years down the road.

It is our action today – how to transform old cities, tackle the social and environmental challenges they created and how to build new cities, investing in green, smart, low-carbon, and inclusive urbanization – it is this action that will determine the future sustainability of our cities and of our planet and society.

That is why this symposium is so timely.

Indeed, cities are ringing the alarm bells and we ignore the signals at our own peril.

Worldwide, 828 million people live in slums today and the number keeps rising.

The world's cities occupy just 2 per cent of the Earth's land, but account for 60-80 per cent of global energy consumption and 75 per cent of global carbon emissions.

Rapid urbanization is also putting pressure on fresh water supplies, city infrastructure, social services, including health and education, and on jobs.

China is not immune to this trend.

Take water, for example.

The prefecture-level cities and urban centers take up 6.5 per cent of China's land but they account for 85 per cent of China's total water consumption.

What about transport?

Traffic congestion has come to dominate news about big cities, along with alarming reports on air quality and the impact on health.

Indeed, according to some estimate, economic loss due to the impact of air pollution is close to 3 per cent of China's gross national income.

In the face of these challenges, shall we return to the rural economies?

Clearly, abandoning the cities is not the answer.

From the onset of industrialization, urbanization has been on an upward trajectory.

For all the problems they create, cities also create opportunities.

They are centers of commerce and engines of growth.

In most countries, cities have become major sites for education, culture, and scientific and technological innovations, enriching our social and cultural fabric.

Cities' role as powerful drivers of economic growth extends beyond city boundaries. They create income generation opportunities for surrounding rural areas, helping reduce rural poverty.

Worldwide, cities generate over 70 per cent of the global GDP. In Africa, 60 per cent of the region's GDP is created in cities.

In China, prefecture-level cities and other large urban centers generate 61 per cent of China's GDP.

Clearly, the avenue to future sustainability runs through sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization.

The common challenge facing governments, local authorities, businesses and other stakeholders is one and the same – how can we work together in partnership to achieve sustainable urbanization and create sustainable cities?

What are the measures that have proven effective? What are the lessons learned and success stories?

It is the purpose of this Symposium to address these questions.

Through seven thematic sessions, we hope participants will share their diverse perspectives and experiences on how to advance sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization.

We hope to gather these lessons and share them broadly – with all actors who are actively engaged in making our cities better, more productive and more livable.

In this process, Governments, including local authorities, will have to take on major responsibilities, with active participation by business and civil society.

In doing so, I invite participants to think beyond urban planning, critical as it is.

I hope participants will approach cities as a system, or if you allow, as a living organism.

We need to think holistically, cutting across disciplines or sectors.

We need to put people at the centre of our efforts – whether it is for housing, infrastructure, services, business or culture – and ensure equitable access to public services for all.

We need to approach cities as an integral part of our sustainable development strategies.

We should avoid addressing urban challenges in silo.

Our efforts to provide housing, water, sanitation, transport, health care, education, jobs, disaster relief, and others, ought to be planned, managed and implemented in a balanced, integrated way, rather than in a piecemeal fashion.

For me, a sustainable city will be a place of economic dynamism. An engine of inclusive, balanced, smart, green and low-carbon economic growth. A place for social progress with social cohesion, socially-balanced housing, as well as public services for all, including health care and education.

A city like this will be a resilient city, capable of dealing with disasters and fighting climate change.

A sustainable city will also be a place for youth, for cultural dialogue and diversity.

A sustainable city will be a place of green space and environmental regeneration.

In short, a sustainable city is a city we all want, for us and for our children.

I look forward to your presentations and discussions.

Thank you.