

Statement by Mr. Md. Mustafizur Rahman, Deputy Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN at the Seventh Session of Open-ended Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals on “Sustainable cities and human settlements, sustainable transport ” New York, 6 January, 2014

Mr. Chair,

Let me begin by aligning ourselves with the statement made by Fiji -on behalf of G 77 and China, and Benin – on behalf of the LDCs, on the topic “Sustainable cities and human settlements, sustainable transport ”. We would also like to thank the keynote speakers for their informative and thought provoking presentation.

Mr. Chair,

It is evident that urbanization is a significant demographic phenomenon that needs to be well managed, as we look towards a global development agenda beyond 2015. Urbanization is also intrinsically linked to the overarching goal of eradication of poverty. When the MDGs were adopted in 2000, most of the humanity lived in rural areas. So, urbanization was not a major issue then. We captured it under MDG target 7d - improving the lives of slum dwellers. The target has already been met, although 33 % of the total urban population in those countries still live in slums with stark inequalities and conditions of deprivation and desperation.

Now, thirteen years later, half of the global population lives in cities, with a billion of urban poor in informal settlements. Also, it is important to reflect that the rural-urban drift occurring rapidly and rampantly in developing countries. As has been reported, by 2035, all developing regions, most notably Asia and Africa, will be more urban than rural. Cities will be the driver of economic growth.

It is, therefore, critically important to develop cities that are environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, economically productive and resilient. Governments with the support of international community need to step up their slum prevention and slum upgrading efforts. In this connection, it is imperative for us to adopt a fresh target on slums under the post-2015 agenda.

Specific attention would need to be paid to basic deliverables such as improved access to adequate housing, water, sanitation, energy and public transport for a safe and healthy living environment. Attention would also need to be paid to broader processes such as enhancing inclusive national urban policies and reducing the rate of increase of urban land cover and urban sprawl, in addition to policies or plans to strengthen urban resilience.

Mr. Chair,

In this context, I would like to draw our attention to the concerns and priorities of the Least Developed Countries. People in LDCs often lack access to decent and affordable housing, and basic sanitation. The lacks of basic services pose a continuous health threat also. Given the structural constraints, low technical and financial capacity and multiple vulnerabilities, Least Developed Countries often bear a disproportionately heavy impact of natural and human-induced hazards and face the most daunting reconstruction

challenges.

Another important thing my delegation would like to underscore here is that in order to make cities sustainable, we need to strengthen the backward linkage i.e urban-rural linkage. Increased efforts are needed to promote sustainable and integrated rural and urban development, and to strengthen urban-rural linkages. If we cannot develop our rural areas, generate opportunities there, it will not be possible to achieve or maintain sustainable cities. Here, I would humbly disagree with Mr. Clause of UN Habitat that development encourages rural people to move to urban areas and cities. To the contrary, it is underdevelopment and impoverishment that compels many rural inhabitants to migrate to cities for seeking employment and other economic opportunities. Most often, they end up in the urban slums, where basic services are nearly non-existent. No matter, how better we plan our cities, if we cannot stop movement of rural population to cities in large scale, we will fail to develop sustainable cities that we are discussing here.

In any case, adequate resources are needed to be mobilized and allocated for the attainment of goals in this area as highlighted in the Habitat Agenda, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation relevant to human settlements, as well as relevant commitments contained in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

Finally, Mr. Co-Chair, we welcome the recent United Nations' decision to proclaim 31 October of every year, beginning in 2014, as World Cities Day. The proclamation of the World Cities Day and its subsequent observance and celebration will raise global awareness on the importance of sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization. We also look forward to the UN-Habitat III conference in 2016. In the same vein, we would support some targets in this area that will underpin sustainable development in cities, townships, interlinking development in rural areas.

Thank you.