

HABITAT III
AFRICA REGIONAL MEETING
24-26 FEBRUARY 2016
ABUJA, NIGERIA.

STATEMENT BY Jean Pierre ELONG MBASSI
Secretary General of the United Cities and Local Governments
(UCLG) of Africa

Excellency Honorable Mustapha Baba Shehuri, Minister of State
for Power, Works and Housing, Government of Nigeria ;

Dr Akinwunni Adesina, President, African Development Bank,

Mr Kumaresh Misra, Deputy Secretary General of the United
Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban
Development (Habitat III)

Honorable Ministers here present,

Delegates,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me first and foremost to bring you greetings of the United
Cities and Local Governments of Africa, and of its President,
Khalifa Sall, Mayor of Dakar, the capital city of Senegal.

UCLG Africa is the umbrella organization and the united voice and
representative of local governments on this continent. It represents
all subnational governments, bringing together 40 national

associations of local governments from all over Africa, as well as over 2,000 direct members that are state, provincial, county, regional and city governments with a population of over 200,000 inhabitants. UCLG Africa is also a founding member of the World organization of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), which it is the Africa section.

On behalf of the members and the leadership of UCLG Africa I wish to thank the Government of Nigeria, UN Habitat and the Habitat III Secretariat for having invited UCLG Africa to participate in this very important gathering aiming at identifying and discussing priorities for sustainable urban development in Africa for the coming years, feeding into the final outcome of the upcoming Habitat III Conference in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016.

The local government fraternity of Africa wants also to commend the invaluable contribution of the Presidential Initiative led by the Heads of State of Nigeria and Ghana for supporting the process leading to the definition of the African Urban Agenda, and the adoption of a multistakeholders approach for the definition of a common African position for the Habitat III Conference. The Presidential initiative implemented with the support of the Partnerships Programme under UN Habitat has been instrumental in supporting the elaboration of Habitat III national and regional reports, and in putting on the map Africa rising attention on the challenges of rapid urbanization of the continent.

It is also thanks to the support of the Presidential initiative that top African leaders met with the UN Secretary General in New York in September 2015 to talk about the African Urban Agenda. The African panelists at that high level meeting included Dr. Nkosazana Zuma, President, African Union Commission; Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina, President, African Development Bank; Dr. Carlos Lopez, Executive Director of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. I had the opportunity to carry the voice of African local governments at that same meeting and to table the message I am repeating here today.

Africa is urbanizing at a high pace, and cities are becoming the locus of majority of African people. Whether we like it or not, the future of this continent will be more and more linked to the way cities will be governed and managed, the way they will be inclusive or discriminatory, the way they will safeguard or destroy African values and cultures, the extent to which they will create economic activities and jobs or follow the unsustainable trend in economic development observed so far, the way they will choose to contribute to Africa's sustainable development, integration and unity or work and develop in isolation within national boundaries. The challenge ahead is huge, since within the coming 30 years Africa will have to house in cities the equivalent of nowadays population of the continent amounting over 1 billion people. African city dwellers deserve the right to quality of life, the right to decent jobs, especially for the youth, the right to equality and empowerment, especially for women. Local governments are often on the frontline to addressing these issues.

The good news is that Africa is making headways to creating an enabling environment for cities and local governments to be able to cope with the urban challenge. Many countries are implementing decentralization policies as a way to improve the public governance. There is a growing understanding that local government as a distinct and autonomous sphere of government is complementary and not a competitor to the national government, and that both levels of governments are in the same boat when it comes to building trust between government and the people and to reinforcing the legitimacy of the public authorities. Let us be clear here. There has never been any doubt in the mindset of local government leaders that they are part of the National State and that they should complement and amplify the impact of national authorities policies and actions. Therefore successful local governments in service delivery, local economic development and resilience are the necessary ingredients for the success of any national policies, including national urban policies, insofar as these policies are inspired and defined based on the concerns and wants of the people at the grassroots level whose demands are channelled through their elected local representatives. Successful local governments are also key to the implementation of the global

agendas, be it the 2030 sustainable development agenda, the climate change agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, or the upcoming New Urban Agenda.

We have come a long way. It is at the occasion of the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996 that the UN realized the potential that local governments represent for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and for the first time offered them a platform to hold the first world assembly of mayors and local authorities. This world assembly kicked off the process that led to the creation of the worldwide organization of local governments through the holding of the founding congress of the UCLG in Paris in 2004. The partnership between the UN and the local government fraternity worldwide again proved its importance during the Global Task Force with the involvement of local governments led by UCLG, and that contributed fully to the Financing for Development, SDGs, Climate change and New Urban Agenda debate. Without this full involvement at the Global Task Force there would have been little chance that Goal II on sustainable cities and human settlements would have been adopted.

We are therefore thankful to the African leadership to have accepted to put decentralization high on the political agenda of this continent: the issue of and the need to have local governments' views when defining policies and strategies for the sustainable development and unity of Africa. We wish to reiterate the recognition of African local authorities to the Heads of State and Governments of Africa who in their conference in June 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, adopted the African Charter on Values and Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development, and the creation of the High Council of Local Authorities as a consultative organ of the African Union.

The bad news is that since the decision taken by the Heads of State in June 2014, only 5 countries have signed the Charter, only 1 has ratified, and none has deposited the instruments at the African Union Commission. We therefore urge the Ministers here present to take this issue back home and help expedite the ratification process of the Charter.

Finally, I wish to state that for more than 20 years, African countries including local governments have benefited from the support provided by UN Habitat in their efforts to the better the living conditions of the African people. We sincerely hope that Africa, where the Headquarters of UN Habitat is located, and who is the prime beneficiary of its interventions, will strongly support the maintenance of the UN Habitat in Nairobi, it's continued reinforcement and positive transformation in order to make it the lead UN agency for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, working together with the member countries, the whole UN system, and all stakeholders which want to mobilize themselves for this noble mission.

I am sure we will have fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.

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