

Statement by His Excellency Durga P. Bhattarai, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, at the Seventh Session of the UNGA Open Working Group on SDGs, on the theme “Sustainable cities and human settlements, and sustainable transport”

7 January 2014, New York

As delivered

Mr. Co-chair,

I associate my statement with the statements made by Fiji and Benin on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and LDCs respectively, and wish to make some complementary remarks in my national capacity.

To start with, I wish to congratulate you, the Co-Chairs, for having successfully convened the six sessions of the Open Working Group and welcome this opportunity to participate today at the seventh session, on the combined theme of sustainable cities, human settlements, and sustainable transport. This is a good beginning of the hectic New Year, 2014, for which we have all the best wishes to you, for success ahead.

Our appreciation goes to the Technical Support Teams for their excellent issue briefs and the key-note speakers and panelists for sharing their experience and wisdom with us yesterday and today.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Particularly after Rio+20, we have understood that well planned and holistically-developed cities help create economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies.

This realization has been crucial today as city-dwellers comprise almost half of the world population; to be almost three-fourths by 2050. This ultrafast pace of urbanization has rendered the task of managing the influx of people into and between cities all the more urgent: while urbanization has been rapid, it has also relegated well over 800 million people into slums and increased the disparity among cities, and between cities and rural areas.

The unprecedented scale of urbanization has brought myriad issues to the forefront: from the maintenance of infrastructure and services, sanitation, traffic control, environmental quality, and peace and security, to closing the ever-widening chasm between the rich and poor, as well as the urban and rural. We are concerned that the LDCs and LLDCs emerging from conflicts, like Nepal, suffer the most from these problems.

From the Rio+20, we have also come to understand the importance of synergy between cities in promoting environmentally sustainable as well as economically and socially healthy societies. Holistic policies, well-coordinated with stakeholders at the national, regional, and global levels, are vital for sustainable cities to keep their social and cultural fabrics intact, and also ensure a safe and healthy living environment for all.

We know that the key to sustainable cities rests upon, among other things, social cohesion, economic growth, and employment generation therein. These goals in turn are partial upshots of an environmentally safe and affordable system of transportation, which is capable of improving linkages between urban and other human settlements, productivity of rural areas, resilience to disasters, and, through increasing access to services, social equity.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Like other countries, Nepal is also experiencing rapid urbanization. Nearly one-fifth of Nepal's 29 million population resides in cities today, up from about one-sixth merely a decade ago. The uneven distribution of resources, services and opportunities in various sectors and areas as well as the decade-long armed conflict have brought about mass migration from rural areas, at the cost of overburdening the cities.

It is widely felt that the fast urbanization has brought with it unemployment and inequality, pollution and deteriorating health conditions, massive strain on health and other services, and increased crime. Nonetheless,

we in Nepal are effortful to utilize the opportunity the urbanization presents also as a tool and vehicle to harness synergy to increase efficiency and productivity, ensure effective health and other services, enhance safety and security, and to help bring about an overall sustainable development in the country.

In this connection, we see that while prescriptions to plan new sustainable cities are abundant, not much can be found about acceptable and affordable ways and means to improve on the already existing historic cities like Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Kathmandu Valley treasures three ancient cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, which together house seven of the country's eight UNESCO World Heritage Cultural sites. All three cities have the legacy of very rich natural and cultural heritages for centuries and have experienced massive strain on their cultural resources in the face of the fast growing population in the past few decades. The SDGs should be able to address this and similar concerns as well.

On its part, the Government of Nepal has sought to integrate these various aspects into the national periodic plan under implementation. It aims to spur infrastructure development and modern transport facilities in order to create clean and prosperous cities as a matter of priority, and also improve on the services in rural settlements, which naturally calls for more investment and increased partnership with the private sector.

Nepal is also in the process of creating sustainable transport systems by introducing energy-efficient multimodal transport mechanisms, public mass transportation, clean fuels and vehicles and other environmentally friendly technologies. There again, our success will largely be contingent on the generous support from development partners, especially in the transfer of technology. We appreciate those partners who have fulfilled their commitments despite current economic hardships.

A land-locked and least developed country with a high-cost economy emerging from conflict, Nepal has been trying to do its best. However, while there is room to improve our own performance, even the maximum that we could do on our own would fall far short of the effort the country requires.

On this account, and heeding your call for instructive inputs, Mr. Co-chair, my delegation wishes to put forward the following:

- The issue of sustainable transport should be given priority as a central tenet in the goal of developing sustainable cities and in the process of SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.
- The Technology Bank for the LDCs as outlined in the Istanbul Programme of Action should be implemented at the earliest to help countries like Nepal perform better.
- Urbanization should be built into the SDGs process as an opportunity to harness synergy for sustainable development. In this connection, measures should be in place to ensure that the choice of theories, policies and instruments is coherent to achieve maximum positive benefits.
- Special needs of the existing World Heritage Cultural cities, like those in Kathmandu valley, in preserving their priceless heritages and also meeting their aspirations of attaining modern and sustainable metropolitan character, should be addressed.
- All commitments of bilateral ODA to the LDCs must be met without delay.

Finally, since the need of the hour is to provide increased, predictable and sustained cooperation so that the LDCs are not left behind in the SDGs and post-2015 development process, Nepal adds voice to the fervent call to the international community and all development partners to do all within their cooperative power to ensure that all our cities, urban areas, countries — and the world — are a better and more sustainable place in which to live.

I thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.