



Inauguration of the  
**Bangladesh Urban Forum, Dhaka**

5 December 2011

Opening Speech by Mr. Neal Walker  
UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative

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**Excellency, Mr. Md. Zillur Rahman**, Honourable President of Bangladesh;  
**Mr. Syed Ashrafur Islam** Honourable Minister of Local Government;  
**Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan** Honourable Minister of Housing;  
Mayors and Councillors, Excellencies, senior local and national government officials,  
academics, representatives of development partners and delegates.

It is with great pleasure, and considerable honour, that I speak for the United Nations system in the opening session of this event. The UN Country Team in Bangladesh is rightly proud of its central role within the coalition of partners which has given life to the Bangladesh Urban Forum. There is work to do on the critical issue of urban development, and we are confident that this event will contribute to both thought and action. Our shared objectives are to:

- **Promote knowledge sharing and the development of common understandings between stakeholders;**
- **To promote a wider public awareness of both the challenges and the possible solutions; and**
- **To directly support policymakers in crafting a progressive urban agenda.**

At the outset, I would also like to emphasize that the BUF's purpose is larger than this single, albeit important and major, event. Our bold ambition is to establish a permanent policy and practitioner community that would pro-actively support quality decision making and positively impact the trajectory of urban development.

Underpinning this ambition is the absolute centrality of urban issues to the wider development challenges that face Bangladesh. These challenges span the economic, the social, the governance and the environmental spheres. If we are to succeed in achieving a Vision of Middle Income Status by 2021, of democratic governance building sustainable and inclusive growth for all despite the challenges of climate change, population growth and global slowdowns, then we **MUST SUCCEED** in the urban sector. Bangladesh's cities and towns are both the engine of growth, but also the source of a series of severe environmental and socio-economic pressures. Urbanization offers both opportunities and poses threats. The battle to eradicate poverty, to grow the economy equitably, and to secure the MDGs, must be won in the nations' towns and cities.

I pay tribute to the Government of Bangladesh in recognizing the challenge, in working to define the relevant strategic objectives and in emphasizing a focus on better and more proactive management of urban change. Successful Urban development is intrinsically bound to major objectives the country has set for itself:

- For instance, maintaining momentum towards the Country's enviable MDG achievement records, including poverty reduction;
- And, let us be explicit, it is not only fulfilling the Vision 2021 goal of middle income status, BUT, as the Government has clearly indicated, it is fulfilling that objective **on the basis of social inclusion and equity.**

Effective pro-poor economic growth relies BOTH on the rapid improvement in productivity and the engagement of the wider population in the economy, primarily through decent employment. Ensuring sustainability and respecting environmental limits, is also vital to maintaining growth and supporting improvements in the quality of life. Unplanned and uncontrolled urban development presents very real threats to these processes. In setting out a modern agenda within the Sixth Five Year Plan and in the initial Urban Policy, the Government has laid the basis for achieving equitable and sustainable outcomes in urban areas. **However, we now must urgently move from the planning stage to taking bold and decisive steps in implementation.**

Several aspects of the challenge we face are clear. One is the sheer size of the problems faced in cities in towns; another is the depth of the on-going pressures. As many of us here know, from both our work and our personal experience of living in Dhaka, some of the challenges are daunting. Massive population flows and high densities, choking congestion, overstretched public services and the emergence of highly deprived urban slums are just some of the issues to be tackled.

Like other development actors, the UN system in Bangladesh has long understood that urbanization has a direct and symbiotic relationship with the fundamental transformational forces shaping this country's future. These are not least -- industrialization and structural economic transition, migration flows and demographic changes, global climate change and wider societal modernization. For this reason we have purposefully identified urban development as a single and separate pillar of activity within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework -- the UNDAF -- which governs the inputs of the United Nations system to Bangladesh over the next five years. I look forward to a full and fruitful partnership with Government, and I invite others to join with us in this endeavour.

On that note of partnership, I will close by also paying tribute to the many actors who have made the BUF possible. These specifically include: international donors, such as the UK's Department for International Development and Germany's development cooperation agency - GIZ; Government Ministries and members of Local Consultative Group's Urban Sector Working Group; UN-HABITAT, the World Bank's Water & Sanitation Project; and leading national NGOs and Think Tanks -- the Municipal Association of Bangladesh, Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Institute of Planners, Bangladesh Andolon Paribesh and the Centre for Urban Studies. Finally, special thanks are due to the BUF Secretariat team for their exceptional organizational efforts.

In closing, let me wish you great success in your deliberations, not only in terms of the work you do in these next couple of days, but in terms of IMPACT on quality urban development in Bangladesh over the next years. Thank you very much.