Mr Majid Rousta

The Secretary of the First Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Slum Upgrading Working Group
Speech by Mr. Majid Rousta

General Director of the National Task Force of Enabling and Regularization the Informal Settlements and Secretary of the Regional Slum Upgrading Working Group

Hello, greeting and welcome all dear audiences especially esteemed minister of roads and Urban Development and as well as a member of the APMCHUD bureau Mr. Ali Nikzad, Dr. Hassan Abdollahi, the Honorable Minister of Urban Development Affairs, the Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Vimal Viera Vansa, the Honorable Minister of Construction, Engineering Services, Housing and Common Amenities, the Republic of Sri Lanka, and ambassadors of member countries residing in Tehran, respected representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly especially Mr. Aghaei, head of civil commission of Islamic consultative Assembly, officials and national authorities, all staff deployed from Asia-Pacific and honored guests. Today we are proud to host the First Meeting of the Slum Upgrading Working Group of The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing And Urban Development.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Now for the first time in human history, half of the world’s population lives in cities. It is predicted that by 2025 more than two thirds of this population will be living in cities. While urban development is a global phenomenon, the most urban development growth will be seen in developing countries, so that over 90 percent of new world’s urbanites will be deployed in this sector. This population has been concentrated in large cities of developing countries, such that one out of every four people live in cities with population of over 500000 people, and one out of every ten people in cities with population of over 10 million people.

Cities are driving force of economic growth, and provide employment and various services and promise life quality improvement. However, today cities witness rapid growth, motor vehicle expansion, poor and overcrowded neighborhood that can threaten health, environment and ecological resources, and these disorders endanger urban economy and limit urban life facilities.

Promoting sustainable urban development

Urbanization in Asia-Pacific has passed the track record in terms of scale and speed; and urban development shape will have a profound reflection on the region’s economic competitiveness, social and environmental sustainability over the next two decades. The current practice of urban life and urban development is unsustainable in Asia-Pacific, and associated costs and risks have been distributed unfairly. The
aim of urban development plans of Asia-Pacific region must be sustainable urban
development with an emphasis on strengthening the foundation of ‘new compact cit-
ties with internal development approach’ to provide the possibility for small and large
cities in Asia-Pacific to reach themselves to economic efficiency, environmentally
friendly sustainable urban systems and social comprehensive systems.
Asia-Pacific region has indicated that with economic growth in the past few decades,
it has been successful in reducing poverty. However, this growth has not necessarily
guaranteed life quality improvement for all.

Housing for low-incomes
Not all urban poor live in slums of Asia-Pacific and the reverse is also true, all people
who live in urban slums are not poor. Yet, poor quality of housing and lack of basic
services are in all neighborhoods and shows the dimensions of urban poverty. From
the perspective of some policymakers, slums are not exclusively a problem; but stud-
ies over many years have demonstrated that inhabitants of slums fully participate in
urban economy and have cultural diversity and dynamics. They also have energy,
creativity and skills and must not be looked as unemployed, criminal and rounder
of cities.
The indices of these areas are lack of basic services, housing shortage, and over-
crowding, poor living conditions, lack of security, tenure and poverty. Approaches
that can be considered for low-income people for housing include: improving their
neighborhoods, resettlement, and construction of public houses by the government
and expanding housing strategies in cities.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development by under-
standing this matter intends to consider challenges of urbanization, housing, settle-
ment management, millennium development goals, urban poverty, and slum upgrad-
ing.

In this regard, one of the five working groups of the conference was devoted to slum
upgrading issues; the head of Slum Upgrading Working Group of the Asia-Pacific
was assigned to Islamic Republic of Iran in the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference
on Housing and Urban Development held at 12-14 May 2008, Tehran. Urban De-
velopment and Revitalization Organization as a policymaker institution, supervisor
and supporter of development plans of slums on behalf of the ministry of road and
urban development (Islamic Republic of Iran) was responsible for establishing a
permanent secretariat.

After the establishment of Regional Slum Upgrading Working Group Secretariat
in next steps in the third conference of APMCHUD held at 22-24 July 2010 in Solo,
Indonesia, axes of the activities of the secretariat was reaffirmed, and this matter
was considered at the 23rd Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations
Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) on 11-15 April in Nairobi, Kenya.
Planning for organizing the meeting was on the agenda from 2009 in the form of developing services description and executive structure of the working group. In 2010, preparations were done for organizing the meeting such as working group site set up, national committee attended by 15 involved administrators, experts, and international institutions and also national committee attended by more than 20 representatives of relevant systems. With the assistant of God, and 2-year efforts, my colleagues in Urban Development and Revitalization Organization and others involved concluded that this meeting will be held as the first meeting of five committees of ministries of housing and urban development in Asia-Pacific.

This meeting includes three days of talks with deputy ministries, experts and senior executives of member countries and specialists of scientific committee. The core of negotiations is around other issues related to meeting goals besides providing and designing national reports of region countries.

At the end, teachings and best practice are summarized in the form of developing a statement and administrative plan for designing and presenting in the sixth World Urban Forum in Naples, Italy (1-7 September 2012) and fourth APMCHUD conferences in Amman, Jordan (16-18 October 2012).

This meeting is an appropriate opportunity to meet officials, managers, experts and specialists of Asia-Pacific countries in order to exchange knowledge and experiences.

Given that the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility” is considered the ethical foundation of 21 sustainable development agenda, it is expected that all member countries take steps to realize this approach in relation to renewing urban dysfunctional tissues.

It is hoped that findings and results of this meeting which is based on the statement of ministers of member countries in previous conferences can develop regional operational plans and produce documents needed to promote urban renewal and improvement of urban dysfunctional tissues in next APMCHUD conferences.

It is expected that all member countries help to stabilize and continue working group activities by active and serious participation. So that besides institutionalizing the activities, this working group can play role as central point of coordination, exchange, aggregation, and generalization of experiences in the development field of Asia-Pacific development areas. We hope that future meetings of this working group will also be held periodically hosted by other member countries.