

Mr. Ali Nikzad

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**Speech by H.E. Mr. Ali Nikzad
Minister of Roads and Urban
Development of Islamic Republic of
Iran to the First Meeting of the Slum
Upgrading Working
Group of The Asia-Pacific Ministerial
Conference on Housing And
Urban Development**



Excellency Dr. Abdullahi the Honorable Minister of Urban Development Affairs, the Republic of Afghanistan

Excellency Mr. Wimal Weerawansa the Honorable Minister of Construction, Engineering Services, Housing and Common Amenities, the Republic of Sri Lanka

Honorable Member of Parliament Engineer Aghaie, the Chair of the Development Committee of the Islamic Consultative Majlis

Excellencies Ambassadors from Member Countries

Distinguished Representatives from Member Countries

I am very happy to be in this respected gathering for the first meeting of the Asia-Pacific Slum Upgrading Working group in Tehran. I am honored to welcome all of you distinguished guests here as the Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as a member of the APMCHUD bureau.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Your presence here today truly shows the importance that your country places on the issues that will be discussed in this meeting and the joint and common role which we need for sustainable development in the area of housing and urban development in the region.

The Asia-Pacific region as the largest and most populous region of earth is faced today with serious challenges such as rapid urbanization and growing poverty today. Based on the UNDP's 2012 Asia-Pacific Human Development report, the Asia-Pacific region is home to more than half of the world's population which includes 90 million of the world's poor and its area is 30% of the earth's land mass. This densely populated region has a massive share of the deprived population of the developing world. Estimates show that by 2030 its urban population will grow by a factor of two and will reach 2.7 billion people. 95% of the population growth will take place in urban areas which equates to the addition of a new city with a population of one million per week until that date.

More than 70% of the region population lack access to a proper sewerage system. Around 67% are below the poverty line. This widespread deprivation exists alongside parameters such special geographical characteristics, changing climate and a region not prepared to deal with natural disasters. In the past three decades 45% of all natural disasters have occurred in this region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development is a proper venue to discuss and exchange views on the challenges and issues facing urban development in the region. The past three conferences starting in 2006 in New Delhi, Tehran and then Solo have looked at challenges in the areas of urbanization, housing, management of informal settlements, millennium development goals, urban poverty and the expansion of slums. The conference presents a unique opportunity to have the region's officials speak as one and converge urban development policies in Asia-Pacific.

Considering the extreme importance of slum upgrading and also the declaration and action plan of the Second Conference which was hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the declaration of the third conference which took place in Solo Indonesia, the government of I.R. Iran has taken the initiative in guiding the Slum Upgrading Working Group and carrying out the necessary actions and coordination to ensure its successful operation based on the declarations and actions plans from the Tehran and Solo Conferences.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Like many other developing nations Islamic Republic of Iran has experienced rapid urbanization during the past decades. And while both rural and urban populations are growing, the pace of growth in urban areas is much faster.

In Iran with the victory of the Islamic Revolution especial attention has been paid to poverty elimination and the establishment of social justice in the government's development plans. From amongst the most important programs of the government geared towards the low-income groups and slum upgrading we can point to:

The preparation of legal documents and tools and the drafting and passing of the required laws including the Law on Supporting Revitalization, Upgrading, and Renovation of Distressed and Underutilized Urban Fabric and the Law on Organizing and Supporting Production and Supply of Housing, the preparation of incentive packages including the offering low-cost facilities and exemption from paying dues, preparing the grounds for temporary housing, the development and expansion of infrastructures and urban and neighborhood services in slums such as parks, playgrounds, libraries, sport centers, starting micro-credit funds, the offering of health and sanitation classes, leisure-time activities, vocational and technical training especially for the youth and women, implementation of entrepreneurial and livelihood projects, capacity building in local institutions and institution building at the community level.

As the formation of slums often have its roots in the shortage of proper housing for low-income and vulnerable urban groups the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran addressed the issue of slum upgrading in its massive Mehr Housing Program as well.

This program is one of the most important initiatives of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the housing of low-income groups through the offering of 99 year low-cost leases on government lands. The program was started in order to prepare the grounds for the offering of proper housing to all Iranians, especially the low-income groups, strengthening the support role of the government in the supply of housing, achieving social justice and enabling low-income classes with the approach of supporting and guiding mass-building, reducing the share of land price in the finished price of housing, strengthening housing cooperatives, housing builder philanthropists, support institutions and achieving unfired and comprehensive management.



My colleagues in the Urban Development and Revitalization Organization, as the organization in charge of guiding, policy making , planning, management and supervision over the urban and slum upgrading programs as well as hosting the Slum Upgrading Working Group Secretariat, have tried to take the first in the continuation and evolution of the action and implementation plans of the three APMCHUD conferences and the establishment of networks at the implementation and expert level by organizing this meeting, and to create the grounds for the fulfillment of the objectives and goals of APMCHUD.

It is expected that together and alongside each other we will have a fruitful and effective meeting and while establishing a common language and indicators agreed to by member countries, to elevate our knowledge and understanding of sustainable urban development especially on slum upgrading and enabling activities. I hope that with the holding of this meeting the grounds for the exchange of knowhow and experiences for the upgrading on distressed fabrics and informal settlements, and the formation of a network comprised of research institutions, government agencies and non-government bodies within the Asia-Pacific countries will be created.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In closing while wishing much success for this meeting I would you like to again welcome our distinguished guests and the honorable ambassadors of the Member Countries to our beautiful capital Tehran and wish you a pleasant visit with us.

Thank You