

OPINION

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

MAKING NEW URBAN AGENDA A TRANSFORMATIVE REALITY

Video message from the Prince of Wales, Prince Charles, for the World Urban Forum 2018 (Feb 7-13) in Kuala Lumpur

IT gives me great pleasure to send this message to you in Kuala Lumpur for the 9th session of the World Urban Forum.

Now, I'm only sorry I cannot be with you in person, as the vitally important matters you will discuss require decisive action if we are to have any hope of achieving the critical Sustainable Development Goals – which, as you will know, are so dependent upon practical implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Failure to grasp these issues within the limited – and ever decreasing – time available will have catastrophic consequences for our planet.

What continues to be so very difficult to comprehend beyond this audience, ladies and gentlemen, is that the world's urban population is expected to almost double in the next 40 years. This alarmingly rapid urbanisation presents urgent and complex challenges for both people and the planet. However, if the world's urban footprint is to grow, we do have an unprecedented opportunity to redefine urban development. If, and only if, planned and managed sensitively, cities can add social, environmental and commercial value, in a way that helps tackle climate change and foster inclusive prosperity.

It seems important to me that we also put equal emphasis on ensuring a holistic approach to urbanisation; one which considers settlements of all sizes and enhances the real and effective integration between urban and rural areas, so that vital eco-systems, bio-diversity and food production are maintained into the future.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen,



Prince Charles called on participants in the World Urban Forum to develop practical initiatives and working partnerships that will make the New Urban Agenda a transformative reality. AFP PIC

whilst we need to identify solutions for urban growth, we must not forget that there could also be opportunities to provide smaller, rural settlements with digital technology to deliver information to villages, so that access to microfinance, social networks and online education can enable a sustainable, distributed economy in which most people could walk or bicycle for their everyday needs.

Interestingly, my old university, Cambridge, is researching the whole issue of "Smart Villages" as part of the Cambridge Malaysian Education and Development Trust.

Now, it would seem obvious that as the urbanisation we face is so rapid, then our response to planning and managing that growth must be equally swift. Essential tools in this respect are urban codes and architectural pattern

books. When used properly, urban codes can enhance creative freedom and diversity and establish overall coherence within each town and city – vital, ladies and gentlemen, if we are to ensure that any such vast urban growth brings some sense of character and human scale, let alone genuine sustainability. Equally vital are rapid response plans, which can, at the most basic level, help protect primary public spaces, transport infrastructure and green corridors that provide a framework for sustainable growth – a kind of "bare bones" approach to planning, in which local communities, of course, have such a vital and invaluable role to play.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have my very best wishes for your deliberations over the coming days in Malaysia, a country I was

thrilled to have the opportunity to visit last November. During that tour I was also delighted to meet Datuk Maimunah Mohamad Sharif, and now to learn subsequently that she has been appointed as the new Executive Director for UN Habitat. I can only wish her every success in what is surely one of the most important agendas of our time.

So, I would, therefore, urge you all to seize the opportunity of this unique gathering to share and develop practical initiatives and working partnerships that will make the New Urban Agenda a transformative reality. Business as usual is not an option if we are to deliver meaningful and positive change for the growing number of people living in towns and cities, and for the generations yet to come whose future is, literally, in our hands.

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