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Opening Speech by

H.E. Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti

OACPS Secretary-General

At the 4th OACPS/EC/UN-Habitat International Tripartite Conference

6th to 8th July 2021, Online Conference

Slum Upgrading and Prevention in the Decade of Action

“Leaving no one and no place behind”

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- Distinguished Ministers and Mayors,
- **Mrs. Marjeta Jager**, Executive Director General for International Partnerships at the European Commission,
- **Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UN-Habitat,
- Honourable Delegates, Community representatives, Financing and Research Partners,
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to be here with you today for the launch of this 4th OACPS/EC/UN-Habitat International Tripartite Conference, which is taking place in the framework of the very fruitful partnership between the OACPS Secretariat, the European Commission, and UN-Habitat. Since 2008, we have joined efforts to contribute to the betterment of the living conditions of the people in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific.

I wish to begin this address by paying special tribute to the presence of the Ministers of the Republic of Fiji and Senegal - the **Hon. Premila Kumar**, Minister of Housing and Community Development, **Hon. Abdoulaye Saydou Sow**, Minister of Urbanism, Housing and Public Hygiene. Without the unwavering

commitment of the highest authorities of our Member States, we would not be able to respond to the challenges of slum upgrading and poverty reduction.

I also salute the presence of **Hon. Aki-Sawyerr**, Mayor of Freetown, representing the engagement of Local Government, as well as **Mrs. Woniala Daniel**, Member of the National Slum Dwellers Federation and Focal Point for the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme in Mbale City. Your presence here this morning comes to remind us of this compelling fact:

*“If nothing is done, **3 billion people** will be forced to live in slums by 2030.”*

Slum upgrading is a key factor for achieving the **Sustainable Development Goal 11**: “MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE.”

As such, the OACPS is particularly proud to have initiated the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP). We appreciate the Programme’s platform to exchange and learn, conduct policy dialogues, assist countries to engage in urban development, and facilitate development frameworks for transformation. Together with our European partner, we welcome the efforts to engage the private sector, new financing frameworks, and to connect policies with community-led actions.

So what has been achieved so far?

In the last 10 years, the Programme has reached out to more than **40 countries, 190 cities and 4 million people** in vulnerable communities. With your commitment, we have established multi-governance frameworks. We have also improved living conditions for more than 520,000 people and provided sustainable livelihoods to about 300,000 women and youth. To date, the PSUP

has helped to increase the land tenure security of slum dwellers, and mobilised thousands of local and national governments, NGOs, and community organisations. It has also made it possible to establish real slum prevention and upgrading strategies.

Distinguished Ministers, Mayors and Guests,

During your working sessions, you will take stock of progress made in transforming living conditions in informal settlements and slums in Members of the OACPS and around the world. You will also take the time to consider lessons and experiences from around the world following **a decade of implementing the PSUP**. We will also listen to the experiences of champion countries and communities of the Programme - thank you all for sharing your much needed experiences and expertise.

Are we 'fit for purpose' to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) in informal settlements and slums? Are we ready to transform a billion lives in the 'Decade of Action', and to addressing the rapid growth expected to lead to **a tripling of slum populations by 2050?**

In responding to those questions, you will consider the setbacks and impact of the ongoing COVID-19, which turned out to be a wake-up call to all of us. The pandemic has aggravated our challenges. We had already around 400 million people living in informal settlements and slums before the pandemic. Often, more than half of the urban population lack safe water, sanitation, energy access, health and education facilities, public spaces, waste management – everybody who has visited a slum or informal settlements knows the conditions of concern.

COVID-19 has shown us how challenging it is to serve all citizens equally and how difficult it is to prioritize the spending of scarce resources in an emergency situation. It has shown how these inequalities make people in informal settlements and slums more vulnerable.

However, on a more positive note, again, I am grateful for the countries that have acted, engaged with people in informal settlements and slums and demonstrated the transformative power of persons when they are supported by local and national governments, and development partners.

In this regard, the OACPS believes that a strengthened multilateral engagement with our international partners, is crucial to addressing the resilience of Member States, against any future global pandemics. This includes the prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), particularly in slums and informal settlements. As Secretary-General of the OACPS, I take this opportunity to launch an appeal to continue to advocate for a system which will promote a more equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in Members of the OACPS and in the world, in particular, in fragile communities. During these unprecedented times, we have seen what it takes to **“leave no one and no place behind”**.

In this context, I would like to reaffirm the OACPS’ willingness to promote and develop **South-South collaborations and exchanges of experiences**, since they provide real **added value** to our development cooperation.

Distinguished Ministers, Mayors and Guests,

Urbanization is one of the priorities of the Organisation of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States, and we see it at the top of the agenda in many regions we serve. It is about leveraging the transformative power of urbanization, while addressing informality and poverty in our cities.

This conference is timely to rethink sustainable urbanisation and development. We need to leverage sustainable development to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. When transforming the lives of the most vulnerable – we are at the heart of the philosophy of the SDGs – People, Planet, Peace and Partnership.

Our joint efforts have been recognized by the Dubai Expo Best Practice Award, the UN DSG's visit to Ghana, and in the UN Secretary General's Report on the immediate response to COVID-19. Thank you for that.

With reference to co-financing and efforts scaling, I would like to congratulate the countries of the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme which have committed co-financing to the current phase of the programme, namely: **Botswana, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Congo, Senegal, The Gambia, and Uganda.**

I am making a passionate call to all the National Governments and Local Authorities represented here to make it a policy and financial priority to create an annual budget towards slum upgrading, and more specifically, to complement funds allocated to the country by the PSUP. We need domestic resources to leverage international finance and enable new partnership models, such as PPPPs – public-private-people-partnerships.

Distinguished Ministers, Mayors and guests,

I wish to conclude by commending our strategic development partners for their commitment and diligence to sustainable and inclusive development cooperation. In no small measure does this support our countries' efforts towards the achievement of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I thank the European Commission for its financial contribution, and hope that our champion countries will have an opportunity to expand on our joint investment and domestic finance that was made available for the transformation of people's lives. Long-term transformation needs long-term partnerships, investment, learning and exchanges with peers to tackle this big challenge in our cities today.

Together, we must continue this path and do even more in view of the rapid pace of the expansion of slums, and scale up our commitments. COVID-19 has shaken our cities. We need to invest together to come out stronger from the crisis, and build resilience for the future.

The OACPS looks forward to receiving the Declaration and Framework for Action that will be adopted at the end of your work. Together, let us take hands to ensure that the prospect of 3 billion people living in slums by 2030, is kept away for a long time, if not forever.

Thank you for your attention.