

NEW YORK, US, October 2 (Infosplusgabon) - As 1.6 billion people today live in inadequate housing, one billion of whom reside in slums and informal settlements, the United Nations is spotlighting affordable homes on Monday's World Habitat Day, which also marked the official start of Urban October – a month of worldwide celebrations and citizens' engagement in urban life worldwide.

“While millions of people lack suitable homes, the stock of vacant houses is gradually increasing,” said Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), in commemorating the Day under the 2017 theme 'Housing Policies: Affordable Homes.'

“Ensuring housing affordability is therefore a complex issue of strategic importance for development, social peace and equality,” a UN statement said on Monday.

It said this year's celebrations were noteworthy as they coincided with the first anniversary of the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, better known as Habitat III, in Quito, Ecuador, which enshrines urbanization as an indispensable for development and a prerequisite for prosperity and growth.

“It is thanks to this paradigm shift that urbanization and development are indivisibly linked one to

another,” Dr. Clos said.

The UN said an analysis of housing affordability over the last 20 years revealed that despite increasing demand, housing – including rentals – has been largely unaffordable for the majority of the world population.

“Handing over housing to the market has proved a failure in providing affordable and adequate housing for all,” Dr. Clos continued.

“We all remember well that housing was at the epicentre of the eruption of the global economic crisis of 2008, instead of being at the heart of the urban policy. Today, 1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing, of which one billion live in slums and informal settlements,” he underscored.

Dr. Clos emphasised that addressing the housing needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, especially women, youth and those who live in slums, must be a priority in the development agendas.

Promoting sound housing policies is also crucial for climate change, resilience, mobility and energy consumption.

Which is why, the Executive Director said, “We would like to remind (the world) on this Day the importance of locating housing at the physical – and holistic – centre of our cities.

“For housing to contribute to national socioeconomic development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Urban Agenda calls for placing housing policies at the centre of national urban policies along with strategies to fight poverty, improve health and employment.”

Each year, World Habitat Day takes on a new theme to promote sustainable development policies to ensure shelter for all – often promoting one of UN-Habitat's focal areas such as inclusive housing and social services; a safe and healthy living environment, with consideration for children, youth, women, elderly and disabled; affordable and sustainable transport and energy; and job creation.

“As we strive to create cities for all, an urgent action for achieving affordable homes requires a global commitment to effective and inclusive housing policies,” Dr. Clos said.

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