

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Good morning

I would like to thank UN-Habitat for their ongoing efforts and hard work in relation to the Erbil Housing Strategy. I would also like to welcome our distinguished guest, Dr. Joan Clos, the Executive Director of the UN-HABITAT and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, who is visiting Kurdistan for the first time.

It is a source of joy to see our partnership with UN-HABITAT is bearing fruit. This high-level meeting is a clear indication of the success of this partnership and we shall continue to work as a team to strengthen it; for we have a long journey of development ahead of us.

Despite the KRG's various interventions, the housing sector in Kurdistan Region suffers from major deficiencies including housing shortages, severe infrastructure problems and lack of services.

The recent development and the prosperity that Kurdistan Region and Erbil city in particular is experiencing, has led to high demand for better housing from the growing local population and many families migrating from the other parts of Iraq. According to the UN-HABITAT figures, total housing need is around 28,500 units plus 7000 units per year to accommodate the growing population. In other words 14,000 units are needed per year for the next five years. The current supply of housing is around 4,000 units per year. It is obvious that the gap between supply and demand is very wide and requires immediate attention.

In the last workshop on 09-10 November 2010, we welcomed the practical ideas presented in the Erbil Housing strategy, the objective of which is to improve access to affordable housing, especially for vulnerable groups (those earning less than \$450 per month which represents 59.8% of the Erbil population).

To insure the success of the Erbil Housing Strategy and to develop a similar strategy for the Kurdistan Region at large, we held many follow-up meetings with our colleagues in KRG and UN-HABITAT. A taskforce was established, which includes representatives of the ministries of Planning, Housing and Reconstruction, Finance and Economy, Municipalities and Tourism as well as representatives of Erbil governor's office, Board of Investment and the UN-HABITAT. So far the taskforce has held many meetings to discuss the various issues related to the housing sector in Erbil. The current version of

the Strategy and the action plan reflect the spirit of teamwork within the taskforce. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank them all:

- Ms. Maha Sabit, Mr. Dafid Overy, Mr. Babar Mumtaz, Mr. Mand Ibrahim, Mr. Mazin Al-Najar from UN-HABITAT
- Mr. Zagros Fatah and Mr. Hoshyar Tahsin Aziz from Ministry of Planning;
- Mr. Zana Rashid, form Erbil Governor's Office
- Mr. Saman Arab Sadiq, from Board of Investment
- Ms. Sarwan Hussein, and Ms. Tamara Buzand Qarabit, from Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism
- Mr. Imad Ahmed Amin, from Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction
- Mr. Bashdar Ahmed Habib, and Mr. Govand Usuf, from Ministry of Finance and Economy

Finally I would like to emphasis that such partnership is a method of knowledge transfer and it is an opportunity to exchange ideas between the KRG and UN-HABITAT on issues related to housing and how to find solutions. We hope that this teamwork and cooperation will continue to develop a strategy for all of the Kurdistan Region.

Thank you for listening