

Opening Remarks by  
Ambassador Namrata S. Kumar  
At the opening of the Design Conference on the World Habitat Day  
**2024 Theme: Engaging youth to create a better urban future**  
**"Climate is changing, plan for the future, act now"**

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Prof. Nada Rozmanec Maticic, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Design  
All the distinguished speakers  
Architect Shri Rajendra Kumar of Lovely University India  
And dear Students

It is indeed a pleasure being part of today's inaugural session of the week-long celebrations of the World Habitat Day organised by the Faculty of Design. Thank you for inviting.

It is an honour to share the initiatives India is undertaking in the crucial area of social development – Housing for All.

Despite global efforts, the United Nations acknowledges that significant challenges remain in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in areas such as poverty, inequality, and the escalating threat of climate change. Housing is a critical component of these challenges, as decent housing is a fundamental right for all citizens to lead a dignified life. This year marks the 39th annual celebration of World Habitat Day, which was established in 1985. The day is observed globally with the goal of enhancing urban living conditions and ensuring suitable housing for all, while promoting sustainable urban development, with the emphasis on equitable access to affordable housing for everyone.

Today, more than half of the global population resides in urban areas, and it is projected that by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will be living in the cities. Many urban areas face stark social inequalities, with some exhibiting extreme disparities such as informal settlements or slums, where access to clean drinking water, proper sanitation, and reliable electricity is a challenge. Congestion in the cities which were not planned to take growing population overload is another challenge to deal with. This is also one of the important factors contributing to over 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from sectors as transportation, buildings, energy consumption, and waste management. Overall, cities are responsible for consuming 78% of the world's primary energy resources.

For a country like India with a population of 1.4 billion, housing poses a significant challenge. According to the World Bank's 2023 development indicators, approximately 36% of India's population resides in urban areas. Furthermore, the Economic Survey of India 2023-24 and reports from NITI Aayog predict that by 2030, over 40% of India's population will be urban dwellers. However, in India housing concerns are just as pressing in rural areas, where about 64% of the population lives. Even if the number of urban dwellers will increase, substantial number of our

people would be living in the rural areas. Our focus, therefore, is equally devoted on providing decent housing to the populations both in our Urban and Rural areas. The Indian government has established comprehensive housing plans for both rural and urban regions.

India's rural housing program launched for providing affordable housing to the disadvantaged sections of rural population was launched in June 1985, which dates back even before the launch of the World Habitat Day. This programme evolved over the years to include all as many beneficiaries as possible from the economically disadvantaged section across the country. The programme was revamped in 2015 under the name of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G), with the inclusion of systems to ensure direct benefit transfers to recipients and better monitoring systems for tracking speedy construction as well as speedy provision of housing.

In the same year, the Government of India also initiated one of the largest urban housing programs in the world, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) or PMAY (U), to provide affordable housing in urban areas. Under this mission, the Ministry has been assisting states and union territories in addressing the housing needs of slum dwellers and other economically weaker sections (EWS), low-income groups (LIG), and middle-income groups (MIG) in urban areas. This effort aims to cater to the housing requirements of at least 19 million households, equivalent to the entire population of the Netherlands. The PMAY (U) has four components: (a) In Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR), (b) the abovementioned CLSS, (c) Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP), and (d) Beneficiary-Led Individual House Construction/Enhancement (BLC).

Noteworthy is the establishment of the TECHNOLOGY SUB-MISSION (TSM) under PMAY-U, aimed at promoting sustainable technological solutions for faster and cost-effective construction of houses tailored to the diverse geo-climatic conditions and hazards across the country. In 2019, the Global Housing Technology Challenge-India was launched to identify and implement globally proven construction technologies that are sustainable, green, and disaster-resilient, seeking to revolutionize the affordable housing sector. Moreover, young designers and architects in India are innovating environmentally friendly housing designs. Thus, while there are large-scale programs to meet the housing needs of India's population, there is also a concurrent process of innovation underway.

Speaking about the young designers, architects, engineers, entrepreneurs, and leaders taking an interest in the housing sector in India, where the youth is both a consumer and contributor, this year's World Habitat Day theme, "Engaging youth to create a better urban future," is perfectly aligned with the focus on involving youth in the decision-making process in this sector. Today, approximately 60-70% of the population living in cities worldwide is a young population. Therefore, involving young people in designing and planning cities and communities becomes increasingly important. Including their perspectives and needs by empowering them in decision-making processes will make our cities more livable from a future-oriented perspective. The youth of today is full of creative energy, and harnessing this energy creatively will benefit us in creating a sustainable and brighter future for all.

Speaking of youth involvement, I also want to highlight the importance of mobilizing support from all sectors of society to achieve the crucial Sustainable Development Goal of Housing for All. Governments play a key role, but it is essential for all stakeholders in the community to come together to attain this objective. There are exemplary case studies in India where communities have successfully provided solutions for affordable housing. Similarly, the Rs 2,000 crore (267 million USD) Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP), a joint initiative between the Adani Group and the Maharashtra government launched last year, aims to transform Dharavi, one of India's largest slums. This is the largest slum redevelopment project in Asia, covering 640 acres in Mumbai. The project's uniqueness lies in the numerous challenges it faces, including high population density, height restrictions due to nearby flight operations, Coastal Regulation Zone norms, integration of residential and commercial properties, and its close proximity to the Mithi River. The timeline for relocating eligible families is two and a half years from the launch date. The joint venture plans to construct between 15,000 and 20,000 housing units on the designated land.

For the students and those interested in studying and knowing more about remarkable case-studies and stories of how India addressing its population's needs both in terms of attaining the SDGs and developing other innovative, creative, boutique sustainable housing projects, I encourage you and welcome you to visit India. It is indeed a beautiful and incredible country to explore.

Thank you once again and wish both the organizers and the participants of a conference success.

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