



Statement

Prof. Assoc. Mrs. Eglantina Gjermeni,

Minister of Urban Development, Republic of Albania

Honorable Secretary Executive of the Committee Mr. Bach,

Honorable Colleagues Ministers,

Honorable Excellency's,

Dear participants,

It is a special pleasure for me to be present here, in this seventy – sixth Session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management, and address the Committee on the challenges and progress made by Albania in the areas of sustainable housing, urban development and land management.

The Ministry of Urban Development was established for the first time in Albania back in 2013 aiming to provide and develop a new approach towards planning and sustainability.

In the last two years as a government we have undertaken some major reforms and planned interventions deemed necessary, to provide social cohesion and better usage of natural resources, where transparency and the *“balance between public and private interests”*, have played a central role.

In the light of the new territorial reform implemented in Albania not long ago we now have 61 municipalities out of 374 local units that we had before.

The main goal of this new reform is to achieve equal economic growth and social cohesion in the country as well as better management of local resources.

Good spatial planning is a prerequisite of sustainability, social cohesion and economic growth for a country.

It is also an ambition and a goal that we, as a government, are eager to fulfill taking in consideration the best interest of our citizens.

In 2013, we took the initiative in designing the National General Territorial Plan and two inter-sectorial plans.

These planning instruments mark a historical moment for the country and become of special importance as they aim to provide sustainable development and efficient management of the country's natural resources and potentials.

Moreover they will guide investments; regulate territorial control; ensure environmental protection and boost the social-economic development of the country

Parallel to the three national plans as a government we took another important decision to financially and technically support 26 municipalities out of 61 in designing their own Local General Spatial Plans.

All the planning initiatives feed one goal that is to create favorable and sustainable habitats for our citizens.

For countries like Albania, the challenges faced in terms of sustainable development and growth, are of short and long term.

In these last 25 years, Albania as many countries in the region faced the shrinking of smaller cities and the expansion of larger ones whether in population, economic, social and environmental terms.

Aiming at a more cohesive and integrated development of the cities, in 2013, we remodeled the Regional Development Fund.

This fund is a financial mechanism used by the Central Government open to all municipalities to apply with projects and receive funding. The fund supports projects in the field of infrastructure, digitalization, urbanization, education, cultural and revitalization.

In these last two years the government of Albania has invested around 150 million EUROS by funding projects in almost every

city to revitalize the social and economic life even in smaller cities.

Informal dwellings continue to remain an issue for the country that is why apart from the legalization process of informal buildings we are also implementing urbanization projects.

This is a challenging process and requires a harmonized cooperation among the central and local government.

That is why, in 2014, for the first time in Albania, we initiated the financing and implementation of urbanization project in informal settlement, in cooperation with local governments.

In a two years' period, we were able to implement 3 pilot projects with a total value of around 3.1 million US Dollars for the urbanization of informal settlements in 3 different municipalities.

The implementation of these projects enabled around 25,000 people to live in better road infrastructure and sanitation conditions as well as to have better services provided to them.

Providing suitable housing for the vulnerable groups and in particular for Roma and Egyptian community, it is a strategic priority for the Albanian government and especially the Ministry of Urban Development.

Our main goal is to create affordable houses for vulnerable groups in order to **sustain social inclusion of those at risk of poverty and exclusion.**

In 2013, with the support of UNDP program in Albania, we started drafting the first Social Housing Strategy 2015 – 2025.

The Social Housing Strategy will act as a roadmap for a long frame of 10 years, based on the principles of availability, accessibility, affordability and the adequacy of the overall housing package.

As far as the deprived communities are concerned, since 2014 we have allocated a special budgetary fund for the reconstruction of houses for Roma and Egyptian communities.

In this global network, where time efficiency has become our main concern, the development and usage of electronic applications has become more and more handy.

As a government we have started the work for establishing a paperless building permit process as the only standard procedure.

We have allocated the funds for the designing of the e-building permit software and by 2016 the software will be in full operation.

The electronic building permits system falls in line with the on-going national reform taken by the government for the digitalization and facilitation of all services and procedures in the country and will be part of the E - Albania portal.

Dear Secretary Executive,

Colleagues and country representatives,

Sustainability, inclusiveness, social cohesion, urban development and land management in a global society and market can be

achieved only through good cooperation and mutual understanding.

I strongly believe that only through joint commitment and strong cooperation and partnership, at national and international level, we will make possible the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainability and the Committees Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management 2014 - 2020.

Thank you for your attention!