



## STATEMENT TO HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ON THE URBAN CRISIS

When they last met in Port of Spain, our Heads of Government acknowledged the significant challenge being posed by rapid urbanisation and the central role which new and inclusive approaches to urban planning and management play in addressing it. A subsequent call for the preparation of the Commonwealth Urban Agenda was endorsed by Ministers at the Commonwealth Consultative Group of Human Settlements earlier this year, where they called for this issue to be made a standing item on the agenda for CHOGM.

Last week the Australian Government, our host country for this CHOGM, launched its second State of the Australian Cities report. This report strongly reinforces the need for national urban policy as in the words of Minister Albanese “The fact is our cities have become too important to ignore”.

The key messages for this CHOGM are that

- Cities produce as much as 80% of national wealth and getting the cities right is key to addressing economic growth;
- Action to strengthen the economy and put people into work are ultimately place based, which is planning;
- The cities of the Commonwealth are growing at a rapid rate with 23.7 million people being added to the urban population each year;
- Urban poverty remains a significant issue with 1/3 of our 2.1 billion citizens currently living in slums;
- Cities will be profoundly affected by climate change with the estimated 150 million climate change refugees impacting on migration and urban growth;
- The enormity of the challenges faced in the urban areas of the Commonwealth requires joint action between national, regional and local government;
- Social inclusion through participatory forms of strategic, integrated planning is crucial to improve stability in our cities.

### **The Commonwealth needs to respond by developing an evidence base for policy making to address urban concerns by supporting**

- **the call for the Commonwealth Urban Agenda to be made a standing item on the agenda for CHOGM.**
- **ComHabitat’s State of the Commonwealth Cities programme as an appropriate reporting mechanism which, in the words of Minister Albanese, provides a solid foundation of evidence-based information to inform urban policy.**

Evidence - based urban policy can address critical threats including

- Threats to social stability coming from exclusion, poverty, lack of tenure and lack of decent or affordable housing
- The impacts of natural disasters on citizens living in hazardous locations as well as on urban areas which are concentrations of investment;
- The critical link between urban growth and food security with urban growth eroding food production land by 20km<sup>2</sup> per day globally.

A shared Commonwealth Urban Agenda can point policy makers to a basic set of practical actions which include

- Ensuring that there is an urban dimension to economic policy as urban policy built around local economic development can be an important contributor to national wealth creation;
- Ensuring that the impacts of climate change are addressed especially where concentrations of people are at greatest risk and in areas of investment - emergency planning and risk reduction strategies make economic sense and save lives.
- Making land available to accommodate new urban growth with development following infrastructure planning to minimise the high costs of retrofitting infrastructure in established urban concentrations;
- Building urban wealth through the provision of affordable land and legal title;
- City-to-city learning through Commonwealth networks including the Inclusive Cities Network.