

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

REMARKS TO THE UNITAR/CIFAL NETWORK STEERING COMMITTEE

Atlanta, 8 May 2008

Madam Mayor,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join all of you here in Atlanta – city of superlatives. The busiest airport, the landmark Olympics, the iconic civil rights leader, the peacemaking former President; they all are to be found here. This is a hub of private enterprise, an engine of growth and a wellspring of dynamism.

Atlanta's outsized reputation made it an obvious choice when the United Nations, through UNITAR, started thinking of partnering with local governments to share knowledge and to build best practices.

We were, however, fortunate that this great city's political and civic leaders not only shared our vision, they worked hard to realize it. As a result, Atlanta's pioneering International Training Centre for Local Authorities and Actors has quickly become a reference point for the entire CIFAL network, as well as a model for collaboration between the United Nations and local authorities.

Madam Mayor, thank you for your leadership in strengthening the partnership between Atlanta and the United Nations. We are doubly proud that you chair this Centre, and serve on the board of UNITAR.

Dear friends and colleagues,

The Atlanta CIFAL Centre reflects the reality that rapid urbanization has emerged as one of the great development challenges of the 21st century. By 2050 some seventy percent of the world's population will be living in urban centers. At the same time, the trend towards decentralization is also placing unprecedented control over social, economic and environmental decision making in the hands of local authorities.

This makes municipal authorities essential partners of the international community in addressing global challenges. After all, it is mayors and the local authorities who are the most closely in touch with the daily needs and aspirations of the world's peoples. That is why, on issues as diverse as climate change and infectious disease, poverty and HIV/AIDS, local leaders are increasingly leading the march towards lasting solutions.

That is also why I count these leaders as one of the UN's most indispensable allies, without whom we cannot hope to achieve our ambitious development agenda. Reflecting this belief, and with the consent of the Member States, local authorities increasingly participate in the most important UN world summits, including recent gatherings on human settlements, sustainable development and the information society.

Reflecting this trend, UNITAR and its partners have also decided to expand their activities for local authorities. The CIFAL Network is a beacon for this partnership. It meets a crucial need to reinforce capacities and exchange good practices among local authorities, the private sector and the United Nations.

Let me thank all CIFAL Directors and the UNITAR team for all that they have done to build this network. And I wish them continued success in the important work ahead. For my part, let me assure all of you that the entire United Nations system and I will remain your close partners in advancing our shared agenda.

Thank you very much.