



FOREWORD BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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This edition of the State of the World's Cities represents a milestone in the efforts of the United Nations to build and disseminate knowledge for policy-makers and the general public: for the first time, the city, rather than the country, is used as the basic unit of analysis.

Sustainable urban development is one of the most pressing challenges facing the human community in the 21st century. The world's urban areas are now home to nearly half of humankind. As more and more people make cities their home, cities will be the arenas in which some of the world's biggest social, economic, environmental and political challenges will be addressed, and where solutions will be found. As globalization proceeds, more cities will find themselves managing problems and opportunities that used to be the exclusive domain of national governments. And as more cities come to have populations and economies larger than those of many countries, cities will increasingly become the main players in the global economy.

If cities are hubs of dynamism, change and opportunity, they are also places of exploitation, disease and unemployment. Crime, drug abuse and pollution have increased in growing numbers of cities. New tensions are emerging between migrants and established residents, adding to already sharp divisions along class, racial and ethnic lines. In many cities, slum dwellers number 50 percent of the population or even more, with little or no access to adequate housing and basic services.

Among this report's main conclusions is that local democracy is a key factor for the future of all cities. When States treat local authorities as partners, and allow urban residents a voice in the way their streets, stores and workplaces are managed, cities are usually more efficient and livable. Such cities in turn enhance democracy nationally, and make local and national economies stronger.

The State of the World's Cities, published in conjunction with the June 2001 Special Session of the General Assembly (Istanbul + 5), aims to contribute to our collective efforts to implement the Habitat Agenda, and enable the world's cities to fulfil their great potential. Its detailed portrait of urban life at a critical juncture merits consideration by the widest possible audience.

United Nations Headquarters, New York, June 2001