

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE INTER-ETHNIC CITY**  
**Rome, 1 June 2011**

Your Excellency, Vincenzo Scotti, Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Honourable Mayors,  
Esteemed Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here. I want to thank our hosts, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has organized this event under the auspices of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

I am here in Italy to join in the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification. Anniversaries are moments to mark the past, but to my mind they are really about the future.

That is precisely what this conference is about. You are focused on central questions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How do we build inclusive societies? How do we promote trust and mutual respect within communities? How do we make the most of our growing diversity?

That hard work requires contributions from each and every one of us.

We meet in what I call an age of mobility. This is an era where people are crossing borders in ever-increasing numbers in pursuit of opportunity and hope for a better life.

Cities are the main centres of action – the hubs, the magnets, the places where people collide and coexist.

By 2030, over five billion people will be living in the world's major cities. Already, half the world's population resides in urban areas. By 2050, this proportion is expected to be more than two-thirds.

Whether as minorities or migrants, many people gravitate to cities for economic opportunities and freedom.

Yet cities face both economic and social challenges in creating an inclusive environment. These challenges have only grown as a result of the global economic crisis and the political transitions that are under way in many countries.

In such a climate, there is a tendency to blame the “other” or to see the “other” as draining the local economy.

Italy has been the recipient of many migrants fleeing political chaos, poverty and uncertainty.

Often, there is unease about managing the diversity of those who come from different origins.

Indeed, in every corner of the world, migration is often the subject of shrill debate – a wedge to provoke social tensions, drive political extremes, fan the flames of discrimination and hatred.

Migrants or minorities become easy scapegoats for job losses or lower wages. Yet, the facts paint a different picture. Migrants tend to complement, rather than displace, national workers. They generate additional demand. They often perform jobs that nationals do not want, even in times of economic crisis.

We should also remember that the profile of migrant workers is not always what we imagine. They are not always low-wage, poorly educated labourers. To the contrary, in many countries and cities they are the best and the brightest: doctors, nurses, engineers and other highly educated professionals. They are entrepreneurs who revitalize neighborhoods and create jobs. These are a welcome addition to any society.

Certainly, in every part of the world, more can be done to build places where natives and newcomers join together for a common purpose; places where all families have assured access to education and health and other vital services.

Only a few decades ago, Italy was a country of emigration. Millions of Italians went abroad. In doing so, they alleviated unemployment, sustained their families and sent home much-needed remittances. Italy showed how international migration can be a triple win: for countries of origin, countries of destination, and migrants and their families.

Italy should bring that wisdom to the global debate. Migration is among the defining issues of our time. That is why, in 2006, we launched the Global Forum on Migration and Development – a series of meetings that has enabled governments make genuine progress on this complex and sensitive issue.

But we have to do more to reap the full benefits. In 2013, the General Assembly will organize a second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. This will be a key opportunity for the international community.

The role of local leaders is fundamental.

Local authorities are essential to the successful integration of migrants and other ethnic minorities, and the effective management of cultural diversity.

Local civil society groups can advance integration at the grassroots level.

Corporations can take special steps to make diversity a priority in recruiting their workforce, procuring new vendors and reaching out to new customers.

Foundations and local educational institutions can provide safe spaces for people from different ethnicities to discuss their differences and act on their common goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am fully aware of the how challenging this agenda can be.

We live in a world where, too often, division sells. It wins votes. It gets ratings. It is much easier to blame others than to think for one's self.

And yet, wherever I go, I have found something else – a growing realization that we are in this together. A sharper understanding that cities and communities do best when everyone has a chance to give their full potential – when all can play a part.

That awareness is what draws all of us together here. It also helps to animate the work of the United Nations itself – which is in many ways like an inter-ethnic city, striving to build solidarity and cooperation among representatives from around the world.

Together, let us deepen our commitment to the common values of inclusion and social acceptance, education and understanding.

Thank you.