



**TEXT OF PRESS STATEMENT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WOMEN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME
ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF
THE 2008 WORLD HABITAT DAY**

For Immediate Release

Abuja – Nigeria This year, World Habitat Day is about ***Harmonious Cities*** and how all of us, rich, poor, young and old can live together better in more caring and cleaner cities. This celebration has been designated by the United Nations every year to reflect on the state of human settlements and the basic right to shelter for all. Marking this event also serves as a reminder to the world of its collective responsibility for the future of the human habitat

The choice of the theme for this year's celebration underscores one fact and one need, in the words of the UN Secretary General: we need to raise awareness about the problems of rapid urbanization, its impact on the environment and the consequences and the challenges of rising urban poverty.

Thus the raison d'être of this Walk by Women Environmental Programme and the Federation of Urban Poor (FEDUP): to raise awareness about the lack of harmony in our cities and the need to improve our urban environment, working in consultation and collaboration with one another.

Already half of all people live in towns and cities and this number is growing irreversibly. In Nigeria, our cities are growing faster and in these cities up to seventy percent of people live in poverty in slums and informal settlements. From Kano to Ibadan, and Abuja to Calabar, the problems of slum life evoked by questions mean that most of our cities are not harmonious. This means, for example, that the rich have access to good schools, good health care, clean neighbourhoods, decent clothes, and acceptable transport, while everywhere the poor are denied these very basic rights and amenities. It is a pity that alongside these problems, in the Federal Capital Territory residents in informal settlements are living under the gloom and threat of forced evictions and demolitions.

We once again use this forum to call on the attention of civil authorities to involve people in all ramifications of development. Embracing the true spirit of sustainable development entails being committed to the dictum: ***development is about people, and there cannot be development when people are not at the centre of it.***



In tackling the challenges of informal settlements, we call on the government to jettison misconceptions about slums and to begin to see them in a positive light. Only in this would strategies and policies aimed at overcoming these challenges would be appreciated.

We appreciate the resilience of community members who have borne the brunt of challenges of existence in informal settlements, particularly in the FCT. We appreciate the support of traditional leaders for their unalloyed support to our activities. We thank UN-HABITAT for their moral and technical support, our friends in the media, and the Central Working Committee of FEDUP.

Priscilla M. ACHAKPA

Executive Director

Women Environmental Programme (WEP) Head Office

Block E Flat 2 Anambra Court

Gaduwa Housing Estate Apo after Legislative Quarters

Abuja - Nigeria

+234 9 672 1633 (office)