

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE
AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL AWARDS TO STATES,
UNION TERRITORIES AND CITIES BY THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING
AND URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION FOR YEAR 2012-13**

Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi: January 21, 2014

1. It gives me great pleasure to be here today for the presentation of the National Awards instituted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. These Awards recognize outstanding contribution in alleviating poverty and improving housing infrastructure for the urban poor through missions and schemes of this Ministry.
2. I congratulate all the best performing states and cities who have been awarded today. I hope the benchmarks that they have set will spur others to uplift their efforts. I also compliment the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation for motivating states, union territories and cities to work towards making the country's urban centres more sustainable and inclusive.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. Urbanization is a phenomenon that has touched every part of the globe. Nearly half of the world lives in cities today. Two years ago, for the first time in history, the urban population outnumbered rural population, marking the advent of a new 'urban millennium'. Cities have become engines of growth and centres of innovation. At the same time, cities have also been subjected to tremendous pressure due to migration, social inequality, civic infrastructure inequity and environmental pollution.
4. In the next forty years, India is projected to witness the highest rise in urban population in the world. Are our cities and towns equipped to face this spurt in population? Are our governance structures and service delivery mechanisms robust enough to meet the expansion envisaged? It is worrisome that our city structures struggle to keep pace. As visible signs of systemic inadequacies, slums and homelessness pose considerable challenges for policymakers. There

are an estimated 93 million slum dwellers in our country, with an urban housing shortage of nearly 18 million. Slum dwellers live in abysmal conditions and are deprived of essential civic amenities. The challenges confronting our cities are daunting, yet surmountable. I applaud the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation for designing and rolling out innovative policies and programmes aimed at bridging the gap in urban housing through increased housing access for the urban poor.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

5. Urban poverty is multi-dimensional. The traditional income and consumption parameters are inadequate to fully capture the nature of deprivation. A more holistic vulnerability-based approach spanning the three key areas - residential, occupational and social - is required to effectively combat poverty. The homeless and slum-dwellers are exposed to residential vulnerability. Those lacking in skill training and formal education and those having uncertain wages, and unsanitary, undignified and oppressive work conditions suffer from occupational vulnerability. Gender, age, disability and social stratification give rise to social vulnerability.
6. Unless urban poverty is understood in the context of vulnerability, any policy intervention will fail to deliver the expected outcomes. It is heartening to note that the schemes of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation resonate with this vulnerability framework. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) is focused on tackling residential vulnerability; Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) and now the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) on occupational vulnerability; and the Rajiv Awas Yojana is geared to address residential, occupational and social vulnerabilities.
7. JNNURM has been decisive in its fight against urban poverty. It is truly commendable that its sub-missions - Basic Services to the Urban Poor, and Integrated Housing and Slum Development – have benefitted the poor and deprived in 980 cities. This scheme has also

provided the impetus to pro-poor budget reforms in urban local bodies. I call upon these institutions to implement the Mission's initiatives in a time bound manner.

8. The Rajiv Awas Yojana has been formulated on the singular focus of bringing slums within the formal housing system. This scheme espouses the innovative features of gender and community empowerment as well as the provision of mortgageable rights. I am pleased to learn about the steps taken to promote slum free city planning to ensure efficient implementation of the scheme objectives. While lauding the cities that have completed the plans, I urge the rest to also follow this novel initiative. I also call upon the states and cities to step up their community mobilization efforts under this scheme. The use of local materials and energy and cost efficient building technologies can lead to a paradigm shift in low cost housing. I am hopeful of such practices being encouraged more while administering the projects.
9. Increasing the accessibility of the urban poor to formal housing underlines the need to address their affordability concerns as well. I am told that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation has recognized the demand side challenges in urban poor housing. The Credit Risk Guarantee Fund and schemes such as Rajiv Rinn Yojana seeks to improve affordability through formal housing finance for the urban poor.
10. The sustainability of poverty alleviation schemes rests on the broader interventions of skills and livelihoods training and creation of self-employment opportunities. The SJSRY scheme and now the NULM have to be leveraged properly for true empowerment of the urban poor. I am confident that tapping the policies and programmes effectively can lead to substantial improvement in provision of housing and basic services in the urban sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

11. Pro-poor reform measures by governments around the world have resulted in halving extreme poverty between 1990 and 2005. Between

2000 and 2010, nearly 200 million people have been lifted out of slums, out of which, India accounts for thirty per cent. I hope the proactive measures being taken will mitigate this further and enable us to move towards a Slum Free India.

12. Cities are the focal points for individual and collective well-being. If the people residing in cities are bogged down by lack of basic amenities, they will be unable to unleash their full potential; to pursue creative efforts. We have to enable people to make their best contribution. Everyone has to partake the benefits that a city provides. Otherwise, we will fall short of success in our endeavours. Our policies and schemes have to continue with vigour till that goal is achieved. Let cities be the harbinger of progress and prosperity in the country.
13. I once again congratulate all the states and cities bestowed with the National Awards today. I wish Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation the very best in all its future programmes. Let me conclude with a few lines from the poet William Wordsworth who wrote and I quote:-

*“This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air”*

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
