



In recent months, Arab cities have been the central meeting ground for courageous calls for better governance, more effective economic management, greater transparency and more freedom. Those legitimate aspirations for human rights and dignity have echoed around the world.

Through the centuries, Arab cities have generated many of humankind's most enduring achievements and legacies. Today, we must ensure that these cities are sustainable and inclusive – able to maintain their cultural and spiritual heritage while advancing well-being for generations to come.

*The State of Arab Cities 2012* offers a timely account of the progress and the problems in these rapidly urbanizing centres of human civilization. It tells us, for example, that urban slums are decreasing in large parts of the region, and that urban innovations are being introduced with dazzling speed. But it also shows how many Arab societies continue to suffer under conflict, extreme poverty and under-development.

Far too often, highly centralized governance structures undermine local authorities' efficiency, perpetuate corruption, obstruct political participation and erode the relationships between the citizenry and the level of government closest to them. The Arab Awakening has delivered welcome change, but there is still much work ahead even in those places where democratic transitions are taking root.

This report also highlights the importance of young people. In most Arab countries, youth make up the majority of the population, and youth unemployment is very high. These trends often converge in the region's cities, where a lack of opportunities and dim prospects for personal and professional advancement can have destabilizing impacts.

Arab nations and cities are at a pivotal moment. As we look to the challenges of the future, *The State of Arab Cities 2012* offers insight and analysis to inform and enlighten. I commend it to a wide global audience.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ki-moon Ban". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**Ban Ki-moon**  
**Secretary-General**  
**United Nations**