

June 7, 2010

Dr. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka  
Under-Secretary-General & Executive Director  
UN-HABITAT New York Office  
Two United Nations Plaza  
Room DC2-0943  
New York, N.Y. 10017, U.S.A.

Dear Under-Secretary General:

I am Yang Jianli, a Harvard Fellow, Kennedy School of Government and President of Initiatives for China. I read with great interest your remarks opening the Shanghai Expo's United Nations Pavilion. They were inspirational in their hope of "better cities, better life" for the urban citizens of the 21st Century.

Understandably, such ceremonial speeches must be dressed with a certain amount of hyperbole to adorn the occasion. However, even with this consideration, I am profoundly concerned with your glowing tribute to the government of China and the municipality of Shanghai for "*accommodating the UN system here, and for making the dream of a wonderful Expo a reality that just takes the breath away!*" At best, this is a surreal distortion of the noble principles of the United Nations, especially of UN HABITAT, the very organization you lead and whose mission is to improve the lives of citizens around the world.

I respectfully submit that no exhibition, no city, no government, however grand its design, deserve such praise when the very ground upon which its structures sit is littered with the pulverized remains of the homes and hopes of citizens who were forcibly evicted to make room for these projects. It has long been an established tenet of civilized societies that the end does not justify the means.

It is a matter of fact that the land upon which the Expo rests and upon which you stood, was home to 18000 families who were forcibly evicted without fair compensation or any due process for redressing their grievances. This is the reality that takes my breath away. The forced evictions that cleared the way for the Shanghai Expo mirror the plight of 300,000 citizens of Beijing who were forcibly evicted for the 2008 Olympic "beautification projects." In fact, forced evictions, and "land grabbing" by government officials in collusion with local developers, account for over 80% of citizen petitions to the Chinese government. The overwhelming majority of these petitions are either ignored or subject the petitioners to further harassment.

I am confident as the executive director of UN HABITAT that you are committed to the ideals of "better cities, better life." It is with this confidence in mind that I respectfully request a meeting with you and a contingent of Shanghai evictees in the spirit of promoting a better understanding of the mission of UN HABITAT and explore how we might truly make "better cities, better life" a true reality for the citizens of China.

Sincerely,

Initiatives for China 公民力量  
Gong Min Li Liang

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Yang Jianli  
President