

SIO Speech for the DED

Members of the International Council on Archives - Section of International Organizations

Distinguished guests

Dear Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to welcome you to the United Nations Office in Nairobi for the 33rd Session of Section of International Organization, International Council on Archives. I am happy to note that we have here with us, so many colleagues from sister agencies from the United Nations family including peace keeping missions in the region. Their presence and that of colleagues from other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions underscores the importance of archives and records management. We are also honored to have here with us the Director Chief Archivist of Kenya, Mr. Lawrence Ichagichu Mwangi who is responsible for our host country's National Archives.

I thank all of you for making time to come to Nairobi. It is my hope that the shared experiences and training you get from the meetings and workshops over the next few days will enhance your knowledge and lead to more effective management of Archives and Records in our respective organisations.

The theme of this year's session "*Archives for development*" is aimed at raising awareness of how good record keeping supports economic and social development. It highlights the importance of current records and historical archives as a foundation for our development work. Without efficient management of our information and knowledge, it would not be possible to build on past policies, past projects, lessons learnt, or best practices which help us improve on programme delivery. Indeed, in the so-called information age, effective organizational development relies more than ever on a sound information management infrastructure.

Many view information management as a mundane bureaucratic function that gets in the way of the real job. Yet, without effective management of information, it would not be possible to hold governments, organizations or individuals to account. Neither would organizations be able to

make informed decisions based on past experience, or make real improvements to the way they do business. Records and archives help eradicate corruption, increase transparency and improve accountability and good governance in society. Records management enables access to timely, accurate and relevant information that is vital to every aspect of an organization's business and to national economic development. And it is through good information management that access to records that are complete, accurate, and reliable is achieved.

Allow me to digress for a moment and refer to the work of my agency. As you are aware, UN-Habitat is the lead agency for housing and urban development. Much of our work in recent times has been post-disaster and post-conflict recovery and re-development. Our experience has shown that unless we can restore and put into order property and land records, efforts in reconstruction and development, and indeed in peace building, are likely to experience considerable delays, prolonging human suffering.

Records and archives are particularly important to the United Nations, which encourages staff mobility so as to create a more versatile, multi-skilled and multi-cultural work force. Staff mobility, however, can only work if there is easy access to institutional memory that provides an accurate account of what has been done in the past, and offers a logical basis on which to proceed.

Yet modern technology brings new challenges to this field. Records keeping has become more complex with emails and shared computer drives becoming repositories for information. Not only do today's records managers have to understand the legal framework that governs their profession, they must also come to grips with modern technology, which is creating new records types, new management practices, and new compliance challenges. Technology has in essence transferred the responsibility of record keeping to every individual who creates and receives electronic records. The challenge now is to build systems that make it easy for every staff member to incorporate record keeping seamlessly into their daily business activities.

At the United Nations Office in Nairobi, we still have some way to go in improving the way we manage our records. Nevertheless, we have made progress and I am pleased to report that UN-Habitat has taken the lead in this process. Implementation of N-Habitat's new archives policy is under way and together with UNON and the UN Environment Programme, UNEP, we are

preparing for implementation of the UN-wide Enterprise Content Management System, currently being piloted at UN Headquarters in New York. We must however ensure that we acquire and develop the requisite expertise to roll out both the manual and electronic Archives and Records Management programmes. We also need to do more work in raising the awareness of staff on the importance of this work.

I feel honoured today to address the unsung heroes of every organization. People whose work in most cases is not recognized until that important bit of information is required and cannot be traced. Many do not realise that the collapse of records systems directly affect development objectives. All of you involved in managing information should be recognized for the vital role you play. You deserve to be supported at the highest levels to ensure that good records management is every individual's responsibility.

I acknowledge the work of the members of International Council on Archives - Section of International Organisations. I can assure you that your work is really appreciated. And for those of you from outside Kenya, I welcome you to Nairobi.

I wish you all a successful meeting.

Thank you for your kind attention.