<h1 style="color:red;text-align:center">International Scientific Conference</h1>

<h2 style="color:red;text-align:center">"The Challenges ahead for the new urban world: what development model for Moroccan cities?"</h2>

<h2 style="color:red;text-align:center">October 1-2, 2012</h2>

<h2 style="text-align:center">Opening address
by the Director General of the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies</h2>

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the outset, I wish to extend a warm welcome to participants to this international scientific conference on "the Challenges ahead for the new urban world: what development model for Moroccan cities?" and most notably, to those who have come a long way to share their expertise and contribute to advancing our thinking on a topic of such importance.

IRES is organizing this international conference, to which Moroccan and international officials and experts have been invited, with the intent of spurring a high level discussion on available knowledge and good practices in urban management, planning and forecasting. This initiative comes at a time when our country is in the process of designing a new urban policy.

IRES's interest in urban' strategic issues was further sharpened by the outcome of its three research programs on: "Social ties in Morocco," "Climate change," and "Morocco's global competitiveness."

The results stemming from the research program on social ties emphasize the need for improved city governance, the renewal of local elites and the promotion of integrated urban policies, which foster social inclusion and mixity. The conclusions of the research program on climate change underscore the risk associated with the concentration of human and economic activities in coastal areas and the imperative of sustainable management of resources and activities in our cities. The need to ensure that cities are masters of their own destinies and become more competitive is one of the key recommendations of the research program on Morocco's global competitiveness.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For over almost a century, our planet has been driven by a movement of reckless urbanization, which has given rise to hopes in terms of better living standards, most notably in developing countries, but which has also brought about concerns given challenges relating to environmental sustainability. According to the United Nations, 2008 marked the first time in history when the inhabitants of urban areas outnumbered those living in rural areas. With 6 billion inhabitants, urban populations are expected to account for 70% of global population by 2050.

The growth in urban population is expected to be particularly rapid in developing countries, which will be home to 80% of global urban population by 2050. The fastest growth will be recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa, where urban population could more than triple between 2010 and 2050, as compared to a two-fold growth in the MENA region and in Asia (excluding Japan) and a 38% increase in Latin America.

This rapid urbanization will require substantive investment in sanitation networks, infrastructure and basic equipments, which by far exceed the financial means of developing countries. It also raises human development challenges as it is likely to exacerbate poverty and unequal access to basic services and employment.

If developing countries do not implement innovative urban development and equipment policies, the number of inhabitants living in slums could reach 3 billion by 2050, as against one billion currently according to the UN (UN-Habitat). Moreover, the management of urbanization must be conceived within a broader development vision, based on social integration, sustainable development and good governance.

A well thought-out and managed city provides a bulwark against the thriving of informal economies and the proliferation of areas of lawlessness and, as a result, against the degradation of economic activities, the weakening of social ties and decline of confidence in institutions.

Such a city can boost competitiveness and make urban spaces more attractive. Thus, in order to ensure harmonious and well thought-out urban development, it is judicious to think of a city as an integrated space of social and cultural life, economic activity, responsible environmental management and democratic practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Morocco, the urbanization rate, which was below 10% in the early 20th Century, reached 29%, that is 3.4 million city-dwellers, in 1960, according the first census carried out in post-independent Morocco, and grew to 55.1% in 2004, that is 16.5 million urban dwellers. By 2050, the High Planning Commission expects that 28.4 million inhabitants will live in cities, that is, 68.5% of the overall Moroccan population.

In the 1980's, a new urban management policy was outlined in Morocco. The State progressively let go of its authoritarian management of urban space, in which it attempted to do everything and be everywhere, and shifted towards a more participatory management and intermediation approach. This process is still underway.

Not unlike many other developing countries, the urbanization dynamic has given rise to a number of challenges relating to governance, competitiveness, job creation, social mixity, housing--most notably low-income housing-- life conditions, environment and security.

The challenge of governance

Published in 2006, the report that takes stock of Morocco's fifty years of independence quite rightly reveals that efforts to equip the country and manage its space were late to embrace a territorial planning mindset. This report also identifies the issue of governance, and specifically local governance, as among the main Morocco's future nodes.

In 2011, Morocco adopted a new Constitution which wagers on good governance to meet the challenges of development. The Kingdom is henceforth organized based on the principle of advanced regionalization, which will undoubtedly transform the relationship between the State, regions and cities. In November of 2011, a Department in charge of Urban Policies was created, marking a first in the history of Morocco.

A new urban policy is emerging. Its success will hinge on efficient governance, capable, among other tasks, of anticipating the needs of the city of tomorrow. To do so, policy will have to be designed for the medium and the long term and avoid piecemeal approaches in order to better reckon with the various challenges, to be cross-cutting, multidimensional, participatory and anticipatory, and depend for its implementation on innovative financial resources.

The ability to meet the governance challenge depends on the emergence of a local elite, which is representative of the will of urban populations and able to design urban planning strategies that are adapted to the specificities and typology of their cities (metropolis, medium size or small city). It also requires a rapid modernization of administrative and municipal services to better meet the expectations of city-dwellers and build trusting relationships between local elected officials and elites on the one hand and city-dwellers on the other.

The challenge of competitiveness and innovation

The competitiveness of cities is nowadays an essential lever for the overall competitiveness of a country. In fact, a nation's competitive advantages are drawn, in substance, from the assets of its urban areas.

As the backdrop for wealth creation par excellence, cities can attract foreign investment and spur foreign trade significantly. Their harmonious and balanced development in all respects – qualified human resources, substantial investment in research and development, availability of infrastructure, efficient transport and a reliable business climate—is pivotal in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness. This is why Morocco aims to transform some of its cities into regional, if not international, hubs for global finance (Casablanca Finance City) or transnational transport (Tangier-Med…).

Nowadays, one of the main challenges that Moroccan cities are confronted with is that of developing economic activities which can generate large-scale job creation. This is a major conundrum for a country such as Morocco, which is undergoing an advanced demographic transition and where the employment rate of active population remains low (37.6% in 2010, according to the HCP) as compared to the average rate in emerging countries (close to 55% in 2008, according to the ILO).

Social and cultural challenges

One important aspect of an inclusive urban policy is its ability to foster human development while also promoting social and cultural mixity by rejecting spatial confinement and social marginalization and ensuring the spatial integration of basic social and cultural services. The goal pursued is that of reinforcing social ties and preserving the city's cultural identity.

Cultural diversity is generally fueled by the architectural variety of districts, which constitute the basic socio-spatial unit in which different social groups come together and intermingle. To this end, our cities must celebrate their districts, through their history, memory and built heritage.

In order to ensure social mixity and citizens' wellbeing in cities, it is important to find socially fair, economically viable and architecturally and aesthetically attractive alternatives to unplanned and substandard housing. In this respect, it is essential to resolve land ownership issues, which will constitute a key factor in the future evolution of cities.

The housing policy must be reviewed in such a way as to ensure a better balance between the inclination to build new satellite cities which are autonomous from larger cities and the urgent need to re-urbanize our cities.

The environmental challenge

Access to a healthy environment is a right guaranteed by the Kingdom's Constitution. That's why urban development cannot but be part and parcel of sustainable development, with adequate management of solid and liquid waste, stringent water and air pollution policies, an energy policy based on renewables and energy efficiency and the promotion of green areas within cities.

Promoting a green economy is one of the options available to cities to draw benefit from existing economic growth opportunities while protecting the environment, based on a development model which enables them to immediately start preparing for the requirements of green competitiveness.

The high density of population and human activity in costal cities (60% of Moroccans and 52% of tourism activities) calls for coastal protection measures, especially as these areas are threatened by effects associated with rising sea-water levels due to climate change. This risk is especially acute in areas with a combination of sensitive natural environments and exposure to potential climate hazards, as is the case, for example, in Casablanca, Tangier, Mohammedia, Nador and Saïdia.

Coastal development specifically requires strong commitment on the part of public authorities, translated into integrated and streamlined public policies which promote the protection of coastal areas. To this end, it is essential to develop specific legislation and a land use policy capable of easing the pressure in coastal zones and redressing the imbalance between coastal and inner regions.

The challenge of security

Security challenges are numerous. They include the need to bolster Moroccan cities' ability to anticipate and manage natural, technological as well as anthropogenic risks, while taking into account citizens' growing concerns with urban crime. It is also a matter of laying the foundations of a political culture based on dialog and negotiation with social unrest movements and drawing on renewed social intermediation mechanisms.

Lastly, it is pivotal to resolve the issue of urban sprawl, which has taken worrisome proportions especially in some large cities. Failure to curb this phenomenon could result, among other things, in the reduction in the land surface dedicated to agriculture, and thus partially jeopardizing food safety.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenges detailed above call upon not only public authorities, but also economic players and civil society, to take action. Academics and think tanks also have a role to play in shedding light on some key issues relating to the future of cities. I have outlined a few of these questions below to serve as avenues for further reflection:

- What type of municipal governance, intermediation structures and dialog between citizens, local elected officials and elites are needed to achieve a demanding, dynamic and transparent urban policy?

- What type of administration and municipal services are needed to modernize urban governance and meet citizens' expectations?

- What strategic urban planning to meet cities' future needs?

- How to develop the human resources and infrastructure needed to attract more investment and develop economic activities capable of generating steady employment?

- How to address the shortage of building plots and overcome difficulties linked to the availability of infrastructure in order to bolster cities' competitiveness?

- How to optimize public transport to promote mobility within cities while reducing environmental impact?

- What social and cultural policies should be adopted to foster diversity and inclusion within cities?

- What housing policy to address the issue of improvised and substandard housing while taking into account social, economic, aesthetic and architectural considerations?

- What role should districts, as basic socio-spatial units, play in human relations, cultural exchanges and the circulation of goods and services within a city?

- How to revive cities' history, memory, built heritage and neighborhoods so as to make them more attractive and friendlier?

- What environmental and energy policy should be adopted to ensure the sustainable and responsible development of cities and how can the concept of green economy be the cornerstone of urban policies?

- How to provide better security to cities and citizens in light of rising urban crime and the violence of certain social unrest movements, while also anticipating and managing natural and technological risks?

- How to foster scientific knowledge and develop training curricula to better grasp the challenges of the new urban world and meet the needs of today and tomorrow's citizens?

In short, how can we turn our cities into centers of growth and employment, competitiveness and innovation, but also friendly, pleasant, inclusive, caring and sustainable spaces? How do we transform them into cities with their own urban character, identity and soul?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again, I reiterate my warmest welcome to you at IRES and wish full success to this international scientific meeting.