

**Press statement, Kars Municipality, Turkey
December 16, 2005, given by Mona Serageldin**

We have been working with Kars Municipality for one year today. It has been a very rewarding experience and we are very pleased that we can continue to do so thanks to the Mayor's commitment to promote economic development and our sponsor's commitment to support sustainable initiatives.

The Christensen Fund, established by the Christensen Family, gives grants to promote the conservation of the cultural and natural heritage worldwide. They chose to fund this project to promote sustainable development in Kars. They chose Kars for two reasons:

1. They believe that Kars has a real potential to become a model of sustainability for the whole of the Caucasus region.
2. They are convinced that Kars has the leadership needed to realize these ambitious goals.

They chose our institute, the Institute for International Urban Development, to work with Kars in achieving these objectives because of our long experience as professors at Harvard University and as practitioners providing specialized expertise to international organizations, local governments, and NGOs.

With over 35 years of experience, I can state without reservation that the Mayor of Kars joins a select group of leading mayors in the developing world who have undertaken institutional assessments to improve the Municipality's effectiveness and equip it with the capacity it needs to drive the economic and social development in the region.

The Mayor undertook this task before the new Municipal Law was passed in July. The Law mandates municipalities to prepare strategic plans with performance targets. Now Kars is at the forefront of Turkish municipalities ready to meet the requirements of the Law.

The Mayor is committed to establishing the processes for strategic planning and participatory urban management adapted to Kars' society and cultural diversity. He has established an external relations unit and a strategic planning unit, and a local initiatives unit will soon be in place. We are assisting him in providing the technical expertise required to support these units to meet existing challenges and new requirements.

Kars faces many economic and demographic challenges but potential exists in agroprocessing, ecological and cultural tourism and even production for export. The Mayor has been actively promoting economic and social development and has established links with national and foreign partners to bring new resources to the local economy. He has also been working within the Municipality to promote participation of civil society in economic and social development. The Kars City Council set up under UN Local Agenda 21 is considered among the most active in Turkey by the UN Habitat representative.

Good strategic planning, partnerships and community-based initiatives are today the hallmark of sustainable development and provide opportunities to secure funding for both economic and social development projects. We undertook this phase of our work as a joint task with the Municipality and people of Kars working closely with the Mayor and his senior staff. We met with relevant City Council commissions, NGOs active in Kars, and Muhtars, and we held community meetings with men and women in the historic center mahallas.

We are convince that Kars has the leadership and human resources in its diverse communities to plan and manage its future development in a sustainable and socially inclusive manner that can indeed become a model in the Caucasus region.