

Summary of discussions and recommendations emanating for the on-line fifth Bureau meeting of the Executive Board for the year 2021

Tuesday 18 March 2021 – 15:00 – 17:00 East Africa Time

Chair:

H.E. Mr. Marek Rohr-Garztecki, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Poland to UN-Habitat
Chair of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat for the biennium 2021-2022

Members of the 2020-2021 Bureau of the Executive Board who were present at the Bureau meeting:

Iran (immediate former Chair), Egypt, Chile, France (immediate former Vice-Chairs).

Members of 2021-2022 Bureau of the Executive Board who were present at the Bureau meeting:

Poland (current Chair), Egypt, France, Pakistan (current Vice-Chairs), Chile (current Rapporteur)

The Chair called the meeting to order at 15:00 (EAT)

1. Adoption of the Agenda

The Bureau adopted the provisional agenda for its fifth meeting for the year 2021 as follows:

1. Adoption of the provisional Agenda;
2. Welcoming remarks by the incoming Chair of the 2021-2022 Bureau of the Executive Board;
3. Hand-over discussions between the outgoing Bureau and the incoming Bureau of the Executive Board;
4. Brief comments by the Executive Director;
5. Organization of work and workplan for the Executive Board including its Bureau and Ad-Hoc working group meetings for 2021 – 2022;
6. Other matters.

2. Welcoming remarks by the incoming Chair of the 2021-2022 Bureau of the Executive Board:

a. Presentation

- i. The newly elected Chair of the 2021-2022 Bureau of the Executive Board acknowledged that it was the very first Bureau meeting since the election of the new Bureau of the Executive Board on 8 April 2021 and congratulated all members on their election. He assured the new Bureau of his full cooperation towards the work of the Bureau. He emphasized that the collective commitment to work closely together as a Bureau will ensure that the sessions of the Executive Board have a successful outcome for UN-Habitat.
- ii. He further expressed his sincere appreciation to the immediate former members of the Bureau and acknowledged their work, mentioning they have successfully established a steady foundation for the Executive Board as well as their leadership in preparing for

the sessions of the Executive Board especially in these unprecedented times in which COVID-19 has affected how to conduct business.

- iii. He stated that the newly elected Bureau will build on this legacy established by the former Bureau to carry forward the strengthened oversight function of the Executive Board and he also reiterated the importance of the work of the Executive Board as an intersessional body of the UN-Habitat Assembly in guiding the Executive Director towards a stronger position in implementing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. He emphasised that the Bureau meeting is of particular importance and significance in terms of establishing linkages and critical building blocks for a firm foundation for the Executive Board including addressing the importance of a solid workplan for the next few months, especially in light of the on-going COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the meeting modalities of the Executive Board.

b. Discussion

There was no specific comment from the Bureau on the remarks by the incoming Chair of the 2021-2022 Bureau of the Executive Board.

c. Outcome

The Bureau took note of the welcoming remarks by the incoming Chair of the 2021-2022 Bureau of the Executive Board.

3. Hand-over discussions between the outgoing Bureau and the incoming Bureau of the Executive Board:

a. Presentation

- i. The immediate former Chair of the 2020-2021 Bureau of the Executive Board congratulated the new Bureau on its election and conveyed his best wishes to the Chair and to the members of the Bureau. He thanked the former Bureau members for their tremendous support to the Islamic Republic of Iran during its tenure as Chair of the Executive Board. He also shared a few areas of recommendation for the work of the newly elected Bureau as follows:
 1. The Chair and the Bureau should keep the meetings of the Executive Board as an anchor for strengthening multilateralism and to the extent possible, guide Member States against politicizing any matters before the Board.
 2. The Bureau may wish, from a strictly technical and practical and not necessarily substantive point, to consider the decision of the Board that the ad hoc working group on Stakeholder Engagement policy meet only when in person is possible, noting that the working group is far behind in terms of its expected accomplishments. Given the continued COVID-19 situation and the fact that organizations and Member States are finding ways to ensure business continuity, he encouraged the Bureau to find ways for the ad hoc working group to continue with its work.
 3. The newly elected Bureau should work with their respective regional groups in encouraging voluntary contributions to UN-Habitat as part of the functions of the Executive Board, which is to guide and support efforts to finance the work of UN-Habitat.
 4. If possible, the newly elected Bureau may wish to review the full functions of the Executive Board to see if there are areas that the Board can better deliver on, given that we

are now two years into the functioning of the new governance structure of UN-Habitat.

- ii. After the presentation by the former Chair of the Bureau, the Chair invited the members of the former Bureau and the newly elected Bureau to also share views on the work of the Executive Board and its Bureau.
 1. The representative of Chile reaffirmed her commitment to represent GRULAC on the Executive Board of UN-Habitat and assured the newly elected Chair of the Executive of her full support in the conduct of his work. She also took the opportunity to express her gratitude to the immediate former Chair for his leadership during his tenure as Chair.
 2. The representative of Egypt thanked the immediate former Chair for his work during his tenure as Chair and acknowledged the commitment of the immediate former Rapporteur of the Executive Board. He also thanked the newly elected Chair and expressed his gratitude to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat and to the Secretariat for the successful organization of the 2021 first session of the Executive Board and reiterated his full support to the Secretariat.
 3. The representative of France acknowledged the work of the Executive Director of UN-Habitat and reaffirmed her full support of the leadership of the Organisation. She took the opportunity to thank the outgoing Bureau members for their tremendous support and commitment. She further emphasized the importance of the role and functions of the Executive Board, noting that it was crucial to continue working on building confidence and trust in the governance structure and in the leadership of UN-Habitat, while respecting the views of all Member States in that process.

b. Discussion

- i. The newly elected Chair thanked the immediate former Chair for sharing his words of wisdom with the newly elected Bureau under Agenda item 2 and encouraged the Bureau to work with and report to their respective regional groups including actively engaging them. He emphasized that he would be counting on the full engagement across all regional groups towards the preparations of the sessions of the Executive Board.
- ii. The Chair recalled the delicate nature of discussions on the development of a stakeholder engagement policy. Specifically, he recalled the discussions held on the draft stakeholder engagement policy under the former governance structure as requested by the Governing Council in its resolution 26/7, and the failure to reach a consensus prior to the first session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly held in May 2019. He further requested technical advice from the Secretariat on this matter.
- iii. At the request of the Chair, the Secretariat provided a brief background on the work of the ad hoc working group on stakeholder engagement policy so far as follows:
 - 1) During its meeting on 10 August 2020, the 2020-2021 Bureau of the Executive Board acknowledged that the end of tour of duty of the former Chair, H.E Ambassador Martha Juarez of Costa Rica has created a leadership vacuum in the ad hoc working group. The Bureau further recommended that the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean States (GRULAC) should be offered the opportunity to maintain the chairing of the ad hoc working group, given that the immediate former Chair was a member of GRULAC. The Bureau had also recommended that should GRULAC not wish to take up the position to lead the ad hoc working group, the Secretariat should send out a note to all Member states to seek their interest in nominating candidates for the position. Subsequently, Mexico as Chair of GRULAC at that time informed

the Secretariat on 2 September 200 that it was willing to have the position open to other regions.

- 2) Accordingly, and following the recommendation made by the Bureau, on 4 September 2020, the Secretariat sent a Note Verbale to all Member States on behalf of the Chair of the Executive Board, inviting the Member States who may be interested in chairing the ad hoc working group to inform the Secretariat by Wednesday 9 September 2020. Subsequently, the Secretariat received formal expressions of interest from the Permanent Representatives of Pakistan and Malawi to chair the ad hoc working group.
 - 3) At its meeting held on 10 September 2020, the Bureau of the Executive Board recommended that the Permanent Representatives of Pakistan and Malawi be endorsed respectively as Chair and Co-Chair of the ad hoc working group, emphasizing that the two should be endorsed by the said ad hoc working group.
 - 4) Guided by Decision 2020/6 and following the afore mentioned recommendation of the Bureau, an organizational meeting of the ad hoc working group was called by the Chair of the Executive Board at that time, on Wednesday 24 February 2021.
 - 5) The meeting was supposed to be strictly organizational, to introduce the nominated new Chair and co-Chair of the group for endorsement and to hear from the Secretariat when an in-person meeting would be feasible on the United Nations Complex as may be advised by UNON.
 - 6) Some Member States strongly objected to holding the meeting and to the adoption the provisional Agenda, recalling paragraph 5 of Decision 2020/6 adopted at the 2020 second session of the Executive Board, which recommends that the ad hoc working group resumes its work once in-person meeting are possible and took a position that any meeting of the ad hoc working group on the development of the stakeholder engagement policy could only take place physically.
 - 7) One Member States further went on the express concern regarding the regional and geographical balance of the chairing of that group.
 - 8) No other members of the ad hoc working group raised objections and based upon the position of some members the Chair had to adjourn the meeting.
- iv. The representative of Egypt on behalf of the African Group reiterated that the Group does not have any objection to holding a strictly organizational meeting of the ad hoc working group for the purpose of endorsing the Chairs of the working group.

c. Outcome

- i. The Bureau took note of the recommendations from the immediate former Chair of the 2021-2022 Bureau of the Executive Board and of the brief background provided by the Secretariat with respect to the work of the ad hoc working group on stakeholder engagement policy.
- ii. The Chair encouraged the members of the Bureau to consult with their respective regional groups on the matter and to come up with some concrete proposals to be discussed at the next Bureau meeting.

4. Brief comments by the Executive Director:

a. Presentation

Under this item, the Executive Director provided brief comments to the Bureau. The full presentation by the Executive Director can be accessed [here](#) and her briefing highlighted the following :

- i. The Executive Director extended her congratulations to the new members of the Bureau for the period 2021/2022 and reiterated her commitment to work with the newly elected Chair, the representatives of Chile, Egypt, France, and Pakistan, for the good of UN-Habitat and the duty UN-Habitat has towards Member States.
- ii. She extended her personal gratitude and that of UN-Habitat to the immediate former members of Bureau led by the Islamic Republic of Iran, working alongside Egypt, France, Chile and Serbia for their support to the Organization in the past year. She emphasized that the re-election of Egypt, France and Chile to the 2021/2022 Bureau will certainly enhance a smooth commencement and continuity of the functioning of the present Bureau.
- iii. She also expressed her gratitude to H.E Mr. Jafar Barmaki of Iran for his stewardship of the Bureau and of the Executive Board in the past year and for his support and ready availability for consultation with the Secretariat during his tenure as Chair, particularly in a year that was quite challenging due to the global pandemic.
- iv. She further emphasized that the coming year is an important and busy one for UN-Habitat, Member states and partners which requires close support from the Bureau. She noted that the CPR high-level midterm review will be held at the end of June and the 2021 second session of the Executive Board will be held in November 2021. In 2022, the first session of the Executive Board will be held in March, followed by the General Assembly mandated High Level Meeting on implementation of the New Urban Agenda in April, followed by the World Urban Forum in June 2022.
- v. The Executive Director also shared with the new members of the Bureau, the functions of the Bureau as outlined both in the Rules of Procedure of the UN-Habitat Assembly and of the Executive Board. The specific functions of the Board in line with Rule 5 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Board are as follows:
 - a. To oversee the implementation of the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat;
 - b. To ensure accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness
 - c. To approve and oversee the implementation of the annual programme of work and budget and the resource mobilization strategy, in accordance with the strategic plans and political guidelines provided by the UN-Habitat Assembly;
 - d. To adopt decisions, within the scope of its mandate, on, among other things, programmatic, operational and budgetary issues for the adequate and effective implementation of resolutions and other decisions adopted by the UN-Habitat Assembly;
 - e. To guide and support efforts to finance the work of UN-Habitat;
 - f. To oversee the compliance of UN-Habitat with evaluations and support auditing functions;
 - g. To collaborate with the executive boards of other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, in accordance with the management reform programme of the Secretary-General
- vi. The Executive Director recalled that in line with Rule 10 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Board, the primary functions of the Bureau include preparation and organization of Board meetings, facilitation of transparent decision-making and promotion of dialogue. In addition, Rule 10 states that “the Bureau shall brief the Board on its deliberations. It shall not have the authority to make decisions on any substantive matters. As part of the preparation and organization of Executive Board meetings and in accordance with the workplan of the Board, the Bureau may consider issues related to the agenda and structure of a session and the documentation for the session, and should highlight issues and recommendations that require consideration and action by the Board”.

b. Discussion

There was no specific comment from the Bureau on the brief comments by the Executive Director.

c. Outcome

The Bureau took note of the briefing by the Executive Director.

5. Organization of work and workplan for the Executive Board including its Bureau and Ad-Hoc working group meetings for 2021 – 2022;

a. Presentation

Under this item, the Executive Director briefed the Bureau on a tentative organization of work and workplan for the Executive Board and its Bureau meetings of 2021-2022. The full presentation by the Executive Director can be accessed [here](#). Her briefing highlighted the following:

- i. The Executive Director briefly revisited one of the outcomes of the 2021 first session of the Executive Board which was Decision 2021/4: on the Methods of work of the Executive Board and workplan of the Executive Board for the year 2021, particularly part (b) of that decision which is on the Date and Agenda for the next session of the Executive Board, in which the Executive Board decided that the second session of the Executive Board in 2021 will be held for two or three days between 16 and 18 November 2021. She also noted that the Board also decided on the provisional agenda for that session.
- ii. In that respect, the Executive Director encouraged the Bureau members to review the decision together with their regional groups with a view to having detailed discussions and a recommendation at the next meeting of the Executive Board. Specifically, and in order to prepare efficiently for the 2021 second session, she noted it would be helpful if the Secretariat receives the Bureau's guidance on whether the session will be for two days or three days and whether there are any changes the Bureau may wish to recommend on the provisional agenda.

b. Discussion

- i. Members of the Bureau emphasized that the Secretariat should ensure that the date of the next Bureau is convenient for all Bureau members in consideration of the holiday break.
- ii. Members of the Bureau further emphasized that the discussions on the alignment of UN-Habitat planning cycle with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) may warrant more than one meeting of the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters as currently scheduled and some flexibility should be applied in that regard.

c. Outcome

- i. The Bureau tentatively agreed to the proposed organization of work as suggested by the Executive Director, pending further consultations on the dates by members of the Bureau with their respective Regional Groups and noting that should the need for extra meetings occur, notably for the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters, additional meetings may be scheduled as follows:

1. On 9 August 2021: Sixth Bureau meeting of the Executive Board

2. On 13 September 2021: ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative Matters would meet to discuss the Work Programme and Budget 2022 in line with decision 2021/4 of the Executive Board
 3. On 15 September 2021, the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative issues would meet to discuss the Alignment of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review Process (QCPR) with UN-Habitat planning cycles in line with the recommendation of the Executive Board, and
 4. From 16 to 18 November 2021 the Second session of the Executive Board for the year 2021 will be held in line with decision 2021/4.
- ii. The Bureau also agreed that the tentative organization of work will be further refined by the Secretariat and discussed in detail during the next meeting of the Bureau scheduled for the moment to be held on 9 August 2021.

6. Other matters

a. Presentation

- i. The Chair brought to the attention of the Bureau, the reports by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) of the United Nations shared by the Secretariat with all Member States on 5 May 2021: (i) Report on Blockchain applications in the United Nations system: towards a state of readiness and (ii) Report on Mainstreaming environmental sustainability across organizations of the United Nations system. He further emphasized that all Member States should have an interest in the JIU review reports as JIU conducts independent external evaluation for the United Nations. The Chair emphasized that these are valuable material that the Executive Board should not miss the opportunity to discuss, particularly on specific recommendations addressed to the governing bodies of UN-Habitat.
- ii. The Chair invited Bureau members to explore how best to engage with the members of the Executive Board including at which forum should the JIU review reports and notes be considered, with the understanding that in accordance with the provisions of article 11(4) of the JIU statute, upon receipt of the report the immediate expected action from UN-Habitat is to distribute it to the governing bodies for consideration. The Chair noted that the Bureau could encourage the Executive Board to take action on any recommendation addressed to the governing bodies of UN-Habitat and the Bureau could also invite for the future the Executive Director to bring to the immediate attention of the Executive Board any report of the JIU relevant to the work of the Governing Bodies.

JIU Report on Blockchain technologies

The Executive Director provided a brief summary on the report JIU Report on Blockchain technologies which can be accessed [here](#). Her briefing highlighted the following :

- iii. The Executive Director recalled that the report states that "The report is an attempt to encourage a new silo-breaking and collaborative approach that blockchain technology allows and supports. A real state of readiness in using blockchains, if and when needed, should be irreversibly built on inter-agency cooperation."
- iv. The Executive Director also noted that UN-Habitat is aware of the advancements made possible by block-chain technology and its application in urban systems. UN-Habitat has yet to explore deeply and within the UN System, and noted that several larger entities like the World Food Programme are, however, taking a lead in that respect.

- v. The Executive Director highlighted that of the 8 recommendations contained in the report, two are most relevant including:
 - (1) Recommendation 1 The governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should ensure that, when applicable, the use of blockchain applications will be integrated, together with other digital technologies, into the innovation strategies and policies adopted by their respective organizations; and
 - (2) Recommendation 2 The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should make sure that the examination of possible blockchain use cases will be based on assessments of project risks, including with respect to relevant organizational policies and regulations on privileges and immunities, data protection, confidentiality, cybersecurity, system integrity, and reputation.
- vi. The Secretariat provided an update on the innovation Unit of UN-Habitat which has developed an internal position paper on the use of blockchain on possible application. The position paper addresses a very critical approach to blockchain, showing the pros and cons in the areas of its implementation in the area of urban development.
- vii. The Secretariat also noted that blockchain was already being implemented in practice by UN-Habitat in Land Registration in Afghanistan where a new digital land registry for urban informal settlements at the Ministry of Urban Development and Land in Afghanistan was set to address access to secure land rights. The land registry solution was handed to the Afghan Government in by UN-Habitat, the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) and the hybrid blockchain platform LTO Network. The ‘goLandRegistry’ solution contains accurate property records, handling at least one million land parcels which are individually registered on blockchain, and occupancy certificates issued. Subsequent changes to the occupancy certificate are possible via immutable transactions using Live Contracts. Property owners are able to demonstrate the authenticity of the certificate independently through the Open Source blockchain verification tool.
- viii. The Secretariat noted that based on the programme as described above, many other countries expressed interest in the possible application of the blockchain but also emphasized a cautious approach on the issues related to data protection and cyber security as well as inclusion, that should be taken into account.

JIU Report on Mainstreaming Environmental Sustainability

The Executive Director provided a brief summary on the report on Mainstreaming Environmental Sustainability which can be accessed [here](#). Her briefing highlighted the following :

- ix. The Executive Director highlighted that the JIU Report on Mainstreaming Environmental Sustainability, is most invaluable to help guide UN-Habitat in developing projects, monitoring their environmental impact and noted that UN-Habitat takes note of the 10 actionable recommendations.
- x. The Executive Director updated the Bureau that UN-Habitat has developed an improved Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) System in order to assure sound environmental and social performance throughout the life cycle of UN-Habitat projects. The ESSS defines the environmental and social objectives and principles that apply to all projects and to the staff that

work on those projects. The safeguard standards guide management of the environmental and social risks and impacts so that the full sustainable development benefits from the project are realized.

- xii. The management procedures provide guidance in four areas: project screening and categorization; impact assessment and management measures; monitoring, evaluation and reporting; and staff responsibilities. The external communication procedures are also described for the benefit of our stakeholders and staff members. UN-Habitat has put in place a task team headed by Mr. Raf Tuts to ensure the Organization meets the requirements by several key donors on this matter.

Focus on substantive discussions during the sessions of the Executive Board and the meetings of its ad hoc working group

- xiii. The Secretariat called for more substantive discussions on the work of UN-Habitat during the sessions of the Executive Board and during the meetings of its ad hoc working groups, highlighting that some Member States expressed it that had sometimes been challenging during past sessions to go beyond procedural issues and focus on substantial matters. The Secretariat emphasized that it was of utmost importance to share a common understanding on the work of the Organization and its strategic importance with respect to the decade of action and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, welcoming the guidance and leadership from the Bureau on how best to reach this.
- xiv. The Secretariat noted as an example the COP 26 that will be held in November 2021, just prior the session of the 2021 second session of the Executive Board. This could constitute a momentum to capitalize on the international attention to climate action and for the Executive Board to give some thoughts on how UN-Habitat's work on climate action can be elevated.

b. Discussion

JIU Reports

The Bureau welcomed the briefing of the Secretariat on the (i) Report on Blockchain applications in the United Nations system: towards a state of readiness and the (ii) Report on Mainstreaming environmental sustainability across organizations of the United Nations system.

Focus on substantive discussions during the sessions of the Executive Board and the meetings of its ad hoc working group

The Bureau supported the suggestion from the Chair that while the work of the ad hoc working group on stakeholder engagement policy may resume at some point, the Bureau should also recommend other forms of meetings involving all Member States, built around presentations on the implementation of the work programme of UN-Habitat but in a logical manner, which could be briefings by the Executive Director or any other member of UN-Habitat's management.

c. Outcome

JIU Reports

The Bureau agreed that the Secretariat should share recommendations and actions taken by UN-Habitat to all Member States in the context of the sessions of the Executive Board as the Executive Board should not

miss the opportunity to discuss, particularly on specific recommendations addressed to the governing bodies of UN-Habitat.

Focus on substantive discussions during the sessions of the Executive Board and the meetings of its ad hoc working group

The Bureau agreed that the Secretariat should hold more regular briefings involving all Member States, anchored on (i) the areas of UN-Habitat's programme of work and/or on (ii) the four domains of change of the 2020-2023 UN-Habitat Strategic Plan. The presentation should be easy to follow for all delegations and focused on UN-Habitat's work. The Chair and members of the Bureau will forward specific proposal for further consideration at the next Bureau meeting.

Informal in-person gathering of the Bureau

The Bureau agreed to meet for an informal in-person gathering, that could be just a coffee, counting on the support of the Secretariat to facilitate the logistical arrangements. Further information on the venue, date and time will be communicated in due course.

The fifth meeting of the Bureau of the Executive Board for the year 2021 was adjourned at 16:15 EAT.
