



United Nations Habitat Assembly of the  
United Nations Human Settlements Programme

First session

Nairobi, 27–31 May 2019

## Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Habitat Assembly at its first session

### Innovation for better quality of life in cities and communities: accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

1. We, the ministers responsible for cities and human settlements, gathered for the first session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), being held in Nairobi from 27 to 31 May 2019, together with representatives of local authorities, international organizations and other stakeholders, recognize that the current unprecedented era of increasing urbanization constitutes both a challenge and an opportunity to promote sustainable development across the urban-rural continuum, including the surrounding territories.
2. We acknowledge that the universal nature of the Assembly provides us with an opportunity to accelerate the implementation of and strengthen the New Urban Agenda,<sup>1</sup> in support of UN-Habitat's vision of "a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world", as well as to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>2</sup> and its Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 11, in local and spatial contexts by making cities and other human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
3. We recognize the systemic and multifaceted transformative power of urbanization and the important role of cities as drivers of solutions to global challenges and of the changes needed for sustainable development, with corresponding citizen engagement, and as hubs for open technological and social innovation and investment capital, as well as in the accumulation and sharing of knowledge, including on, but not limited to, voluntary and mutually agreed terms.
4. We are persuaded of the urgent need to improve quality of life for all, and to promote sustainable patterns of consumption and production, including through, but not limited to, smart technologies, sustainable lifestyles, resource efficiency and moving towards, among other sustainable development strategies, a circular economy.
5. We are, however, deeply concerned about the persistent and emerging economic, social and environmental development challenges that are increasingly and disproportionately concentrated in urban areas and stem from a lack of comprehensive, integrated and coordinated strategic urban planning, particularly in developing countries witnessing accelerated increases in their urban population, including from migration to cities.
6. We understand that innovative approaches and solutions are necessary to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to address urban development challenges in cities of all sizes, taking into

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex.

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1.

consideration the specificities of functional areas, small and middle-sized cities and human settlements.

7. We are confident of the need to invest in integrated, coherent and inclusive approaches in policy development and implementation to address the above-mentioned challenges and consider local needs, assets and potential.

8. We decide to address decent and dignified housing, urban development, and urban-territorial and urban-rural linkages in our cities and other human settlements through the use of innovative solutions in planning, financing, construction, development, management, cooperation and public-private partnerships so as to spearhead poverty eradication efforts.

9. To accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in a tangible way and make its shared vision of a better and sustainable future for all a reality, we hereby commit ourselves to taking the following actions, keeping in mind our national circumstances, specificities and capabilities, at all levels of government, as appropriate:

(a) Adopt and implement place-based innovative, integrated and systemic solutions, including policy measures and corresponding investments to address spatial inequalities, poverty, slums, decent and dignified housing and social protection, and to increase the prosperity of cities, territories and regions, while furthering climate action and urban resilience, as well as to manage crises in urban settings;

(b) Promote smart, sustainable and inclusive strategic planning and integrated technologies that increase resilience, reduce disaster risks and improve decent and dignified housing, water supply and sanitation, vector control, accessibility, sustainable urban mobility and road safety, urban safety, solid waste management, accessible sustainable buildings, green and social spaces, construction and infrastructure, equipment and services, clean energy, ambient air quality, urban extensions, biodiversity conservation, nature-based solutions and sustainable use in cities, communities and human settlements to ensure quality of life for all, with proper attention to gender equality and social inclusion;

(c) Seek state-of-the-art and creative solutions to current and new urban challenges, with particular attention to the urban-rural continuum and territorial surroundings, and to the need to promote the development of rural regions, including through employment opportunities and responses to migration, influxes of refugees and displaced persons, by strengthening public-private partnerships and those with communities and academia and developing participatory solutions for cities and rural settlements;

(d) Strengthen regional, national and local legislation and policies, as well as institutions and service providers, so that they are better able to implement new integrated approaches, new knowledge and sustainable, inclusive and innovative solutions for the communities they serve, including through traditional knowledge and multi-stakeholder partnerships;

(e) Promote sustainable and innovative financing opportunities and mechanisms, including through engagement with regional development banks, local financing instruments such as fiscal mechanisms and micro-finance, and public-private partnerships and community participation;

(f) Unlock new capital for investment in sustainable urbanization in cities of all sizes, keeping in mind the specificities of small and middle-sized cities and other human settlements, and the needs of those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including the host communities of those displaced due to climate change, through appropriate adaptation measures;

(g) Improve urban, village and rural monitoring and forecasting systems, territorial modelling and planning tools, land use mapping and data management capacities, always taking care to protect privacy, so as to strengthen evidence-based policymaking and make progress towards establishing comparable international urban data and indicators;

(h) Recognize the importance of developing monitoring tools, including UN-Habitat's global and local monitoring tools, particularly the City Prosperity Initiative and the Global Urban Observatory, which provide good references and examples;

(i) Engage citizens, communities and civil society, the private sector, institutions of higher learning and professional institutes, in particular through their role in capacity-building and job creation, and all other relevant stakeholders, including women, children, youth and the elderly, persons with disabilities, local communities, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, and persons in vulnerable situations, in participatory and inclusive urban governance;

(j) Strengthen mobilization and advocacy efforts, particularly the yearly observance of Urban October, which starts on World Habitat Day and ends on World Cities Day, to raise awareness, promote participation, generate knowledge and engage the international community in sustainable urban development.

10. We concur that effective action with regard to these commitments requires good governance and the rule of law, coherent, integrated policy frameworks responsive to differentiated needs, notably of women and girls, through mainstreaming and equality assessment, at all levels of government, as well as efficient and effective means of implementation, including mobilization of financial resources from all sources at the local, national, regional and international levels, capacity-building and enhanced access to data and information, with due respect for privacy, and the use of environmentally sound technologies and effective participatory partnerships in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.<sup>3</sup>

11. We endorse the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 and its focus on (a) reducing spatial inequalities and poverty in cities and other human settlements across the urban-rural continuum; (b) enhancing the shared prosperity of cities, territories and regions by making them more inclusive, resilient, sustainable and resource efficient, and by increasing their innovation capacity and enabling them to act as hubs of innovation; (c) strengthening climate action and resilience and improving the urban environment and urban environmental sustainability; and (d) promoting effective urban crisis prevention and response.

12. We highlight the importance of cities and local actors for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation, and in this regard welcome the role of UN-Habitat in the coalition on infrastructure, cities and local action established as part of the preparations for the Climate Action Summit, to be hosted by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York in September 2019, and we commit ourselves to working with the coalition, co-led by Kenya and Turkey, and with the membership of Brazil, Canada, Germany, Mexico and Singapore, with a view to achieving an ambitious outcome, accelerating climate change action at the local level.

13. We welcome and support the outcomes of the ninth session of the World Urban Forum, held in Kuala Lumpur in 2018, and look forward to participating actively in the tenth session, to be held in Abu Dhabi in 2020, and the eleventh session, to be held in Katowice, Poland, in 2022.

14. We call upon the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, in the framework of the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system, to support our local, regional, national and international efforts, including through the strategic optimization of the local, national and regional presence of UN-Habitat, in response to requests by Member States relating to sustainable urban development.

15. We recognize and fully support the role and expertise of UN-Habitat as a focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements and as a centre of excellence and innovation, as well as its capacity to share best practices, in collaboration with Member States, local authorities and other United Nations system entities.

16. We stress the importance of predictable and sustainable funding for UN-Habitat, particularly through voluntary and other commitments, to enable the Programme to fulfil its mandate.

17. We welcome the 2018 report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda,<sup>4</sup> and we call upon the Executive Director, in a transparent manner and while continuing to improve accountability, to follow up on the progress in the implementation of those of the actions set out in the present declaration which fall within the mandate of UN-Habitat, as part of the overall follow-up to progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the latest strategic plan of UN-Habitat.

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<sup>3</sup> General Assembly resolution 69/313, annex.

<sup>4</sup> A/73/83.