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Report of the World Urban Forum

**Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements
Programme: ninth session of the World Urban Forum**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report summarizes the issues discussed at the ninth session of the World Urban Forum, held from 7 to 13 February 2018 in Kuala Lumpur, and the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Cities 2030, adopted by the Forum at that session. The full report of the ninth session and the text of the Declaration are set out in document HSP/HA/1/INF.5.

* HSP/HA/1/1.

I. Introduction

1. The World Urban Forum is the world's premier conference on urban issues. It was established by the United Nations to examine one of the most pressing issues facing the world today: rapid urbanization and its impact on communities, cities, economies, climate change and policies. The Forum is organized and convened by the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 18/5 of the Commission on Human Settlements, in which the Commission requested the Executive Director to promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new urban forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Subsequently, the General Assembly decided, in its resolution 56/206, that the Forum would be a non-legislative technical forum in which experts could exchange views in the years when the Governing Council of UN-Habitat did not meet. In paragraph 7 of its resolution 56/205, the Assembly encouraged local authorities and other Habitat Agenda partners to participate, as appropriate, in the Forum in its role as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

2. In paragraph 167 of the New Urban Agenda, Member States requested that the report on the implementation of the Agenda incorporate, to the extent possible, the inputs of multilateral organizations and processes, civil society, the private sector and academia, and build on existing platforms and processes, such as the World Urban Forum.

3. In its resolution 69/226, the Assembly recognized the Forum as the foremost global arena for interaction among policymakers, local government leaders, non-governmental organizations and expert practitioners in the field of sustainable urban development and human settlements.

4. The Forum, which promotes the strong participation of stakeholders, is held in a different host city and country biennially, drawing a wide range of experts from all walks of life. It has four objectives:

(a) to improve the collective knowledge of sustainable urban development through inclusive open debates, the sharing of lessons learned and the exchange of urban solutions, best practices and good policies;

(b) to increase coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system and among various stakeholders and constituencies for the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda;

(c) to raise awareness of sustainable urbanization among stakeholders and constituencies (including the general public); and

(d) to raise the profile of UN-Habitat.

5. Overall attendance at the various sessions of the Forum rose from 1,200 at the inaugural session in 2002 in Nairobi to more than 4,300 in Barcelona, Spain, in 2004, and to more than 10,400 in Vancouver, Canada, in 2006. In Nanjing, China, in 2008, there were 8,000 participants; the number of participants reached almost 13,800 at the fifth session, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2010; and participants numbered 8,200 at the sixth session, in Naples, Italy, in 2012. The seventh session of the World Urban Forum, held in Medellin, Colombia, in April 2014, brought together over 22,000 attendees from 142 countries. The ninth session of the World Urban Forum, which was held in Kuala Lumpur in 2018, had record attendance, with over 24,000 participants from 164 countries.

6. Since the first session, the Forum has significantly improved its results-oriented approach, identifying focused objectives and measurable indicators of success; designing event formats conducive to achieving relevant outcomes; and strengthening reporting mechanisms to effectively collect the substantive outcomes of the Forum.

7. The outcomes and impacts of the ninth session of the World Urban Forum reflect its unique role and relevance as an inclusive platform supporting the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the achievement of the urban-related Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Overview of the ninth session

8. The ninth session of the Forum, held from 7 to 13 February 2018 in Kuala Lumpur, was organized and convened by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat in collaboration with the Government of Malaysia and the city of Kuala Lumpur.

9. The session was attended by 24,331 people from 164 countries, the highest number to participate in any session of the Forum, demonstrating the convening power of the Forum and the growing global focus on cities as drivers of sustainable development.

10. Participants from national governments, academia and research groups accounted for the highest percentage of participants. However, other groups, such as local and regional governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and foundations, also saw significant growth in their numbers compared to previous sessions.
11. Of the 24,331 accredited attendees, 19,237 were participants and 5,094 worked in support roles. A total of 6,276 participants, or approximately 3 of every 10, were international participants. In all, 45 of the 47 least developed countries were represented at the session.
12. The city of Kuala Lumpur was selected after an open bidding process, and announced as host city in November 2014 during the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development.
13. Under the theme “Cities 2030 – Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban Agenda”, the ninth session of the World Urban Forum presented a unique opportunity to network and spur action for partners that are using the New Urban Agenda as a critical tool for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
14. The city centre of Kuala Lumpur has been revitalized by a series of integrated quality interventions, including relating to public space, housing and mobility. As such, it was the perfect location for the ninth session of the Forum and provided a vision of the transformational power of urbanization promoted by the New Urban Agenda.
15. The ninth session of the Forum was the second Forum to be held in Asia, following the fourth session, which was held in 2008 in Nanjing, China. The ninth session assumed particular significance as the first large-scale event focusing on urban development subsequent to the adoption of the New Urban Agenda in 2016 at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito. The ninth World Urban Forum was also the first event to focus on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.
16. The ninth World Urban Forum contributed to global mobilization and advocacy for a common vision on sustainable urban development and to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The ninth Forum was also particularly instrumental in providing substantive inputs for the first report on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, submitted by UN-Habitat to the Economic and Social Council in July 2018.
17. The ninth session of the Forum was key to the recognition of the unique role of UN-Habitat as a leader and focal point for sustainable urban development, in coordination with all levels of government, stakeholders and the United Nations system.
18. UN-Habitat and its partners engaged in important promotional and mobilization activities before the Forum, both at the global and country levels. Special events, including national and regional urban forums, urban breakfasts and dialogues and urban journalism academies, were held in all regions prior to the Forum under the aegis of UN-Habitat regional and country offices.
19. The background papers and concept notes for all main sessions of the programme were made available online in English as substantive pre-session documents.
20. The Forum offered an impressive range of events, responding to the thematic and specific demands of all types of urban stakeholders, including the general public.
21. The speakers in the dialogues were selected on the basis of the relevance of their work and their qualifications and to ensure regional and gender balance, as well as diversity in perspectives, with representatives from a variety of constituencies, including academia, the private sector, national and local authorities and civil society. Speakers from the least developed countries were also encouraged to participate and received support in that regard.
22. The programme of the session featured more than 600 events, including 143 networking events, 168 side events, 60 training events, 30 “Listen to Cities” events, 33 “One United Nations” events, 33 publication launches and 96 exhibition booths.
23. For the first time in the history of the Forum, six high-level roundtables were held, addressing overarching aspects of sustainable urban development:
 - (a) cities for all and housing at the centre;
 - (b) the urban dimension of climate change action;
 - (c) urbanization and development: investing in the transformative force of cities;
 - (d) an integrated territorial approach to sustainable development;

- (e) innovative governance for open and inclusive cities; and
 - (f) sustainable urban development for peace and security.
24. Other sessions of the main programme included 5 assemblies, 15 stakeholder roundtables, 8 dialogues, 21 special sessions, 3 urban talks, 1 urban journalism academy, 1 ministerial roundtable and 10 plenary meetings.
25. All high-level roundtables and dialogues were broadcast live on United Nations Web TV, increasing the outreach to viewers who were unable to attend the Forum in person.
26. The format of the Forum was enriched by daily debriefing sessions to summarize and debate the conclusions of that day's roundtables and special sessions, a format that allowed participants to get up to speed on the issues debated in meetings that they had not been able to attend. Same-day summaries of the main sessions, provided by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, were posted on the web page of the Forum.
27. Based on the principle of bringing the Forum to local citizens, instituted in 2012 at the sixth session of the World Urban Forum, several events were organized throughout the city, including field visits to areas where successful and innovative projects had been implemented.
28. A total of 36 United Nations system entities were represented at the ninth session of the World Urban Forum, providing an opportunity to strengthen their collective knowledge, coordination and cooperation on sustainable urban development.
29. For the first time, space was given to the promotion of collaborative action within the United Nations system, including a meeting to discuss the collaborative framework for sustainable urbanization and a meeting of resident coordinators.
30. Thirty-three "One United Nations" events were organized by a variety of United Nations agencies, including regional commissions, in collaboration with UN-Habitat and key partners.
31. As part of capacity development for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, 60 training events were organized, the largest number of any Forum to date. Training events comprised a central segment of the Forum and represented a significant contribution to knowledge enhancement and the widespread adoption of urban solutions.
32. An international exhibition area that extended over 12,000 m² was open to the public and received more than 30,000 visitors, with a total of 96 exhibitors from several countries, including urban stakeholders, international organizations and United Nations system entities.
33. The exhibition area included a UN-Habitat pavilion where participants could meet its representatives and learn about its mandate and work.
34. An urban library was made available for participants to find the latest publications on related topics. It also hosted substantive presentations and book signings by urban experts and academics.
35. Speakers with expertise in various fields and from various regions tackled key challenges identified in the New Urban Agenda, using the urban library to network and launch innovative plans, projects and initiatives promoted by national and local governments, stakeholders, United Nations system entities and a variety of partnerships.
36. The World Urban Campaign was an exhibitor, and held its nineteenth steering committee meeting during the Forum. Its members and UN-Habitat reasserted its role as an important driver to assist all stakeholders in scaling up the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.
37. The "AFINUA" room, named after the acronym for the "action framework for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda", and the "UN-Habitat in action" room were the settings for a series of significant events related to initiatives undertaken by UN-Habitat and its partners. The events covered a range of themes related to sustainable urban development and the New Urban Agenda implementation frameworks developed at the global, regional, national and local levels.
38. Three "urban talks" were held in the late afternoons to extend the debate on urbanization. They featured speeches and dialogues with some of the world's most renowned urbanists, economists, sociologists and thinkers on cities and sustainable urban development.
39. The website of the ninth World Urban Forum (www.wuf9.org) served as an effective platform for advocacy and raising awareness, providing links to the details of the programme, including all pre-session documents. It attracted more than 160,000 users and logged a total of 363,627 sessions.

40. The presence of the Forum in online and print media was significant, and there was dynamic public participation through social media, which peaked during the event, continuing the increasing trend.
41. An urban journalism academy training event was held, focused on how to effectively communicate regarding urban issues and featuring lectures from reputable urban journalists and media experts from around the world.

III. Forum outcomes

42. Since the first session of the World Urban Forum, a diverse advisory group has been established prior to each session to advise and assist the Executive Director of UN-Habitat in organizing and conducting the Forum with a view to maximizing its outcomes and inclusivity.
43. The advisory group of the ninth session of the World Urban Forum was chaired by the Malaysian Minister of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government and the President of the UN-Habitat Governing Council and included members from all main constituency groups, selected on the basis of geographical and gender balance.

A. Kuala Lumpur Declaration

44. On the last day of the Forum, the advisory group reached a consensus on a final declaration reflecting the outcomes of debates and the views of stakeholders.
45. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration included actionable recommendations and was read out during the closing ceremony of the Forum.
46. The participants in the ninth session of the World Urban Forum, representing national, subnational and local governments, parliamentarians, civil society, older persons, women, young people, children, persons with disabilities, grassroots groups, indigenous peoples and local communities, the private sector, foundations and philanthropists, international and regional organizations, academia, professionals, and other relevant stakeholders, gathered in Kuala Lumpur to localize and scale up the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
47. Led by a strong spirit of collaboration, creativity and innovation, they shared the aspiration that cities in 2030 would be cities for all, where no one and no place would be left behind.
48. To that end, they called for the deployment of all available efforts and resources to implement the concept of cities for all and ensure that all inhabitants, both present and future, without discrimination of any kind, were able to reside in and contribute to just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all.
49. Participants believed that the global, regional, national and local implementation frameworks of the New Urban Agenda formulated since its adoption should be supported by key enablers capable of unlocking positive transformation, such as:
- (a) Strengthening the role of subnational and local governments and urban governance systems ensuring continuous dialogue among different levels of government and the participation of all actors;
 - (b) Increasing multilevel and cross-sectoral coordination, transparency and accountability;
 - (c) Encouraging the sharing of creative solutions and innovative practices enabling the shift in mindset required to drive change;
 - (d) Building inclusive partnerships and strengthening age- and gender-responsive environments to ensure meaningful participation and engagement at all levels;
 - (e) Adopting integrated territorial development, including through appropriate urban planning and design instruments, to ensure the sustainable management and use of natural resources and land, appropriate population compactness and density, diversity of uses, and revitalization of cultural heritage;
 - (f) Deploying monitoring and reporting mechanisms, including impact assessments, that encourage best practices for effective policy-making.
50. Participants drew attention to the persistent challenges faced by cities and human settlements, including:

- (a) Limited opportunities and mechanisms for youth, women, grassroots and other civil-society organizations, local, subnational and national governments, and international and regional bodies to work together in planning, implementation and monitoring;
- (b) Inequitable access to the city, including to decent jobs, public space, affordable and adequate housing, security of land tenure, safe, efficient and accessible public transport and mobility systems, infrastructure, and other basic goods and services that cities offer;
- (c) Insufficient protection from human rights violations, including forced evictions, and inadequate inclusion of people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups in urban planning, design and legislation processes;
- (d) Gender inequalities in urban economic and leadership spheres.

51. Participants recognized that emerging challenges required urgent action, including:

- (a) Recognizing that crises are increasingly urban, which calls for inclusive urbanization tools adapted to local contexts and to the characteristics of natural and human-made disasters and conflicts, and to guide humanitarian assistance, fast-track recovery, and contribute to building and sustaining peace;
- (b) Managing the complexities of increased migration into cities at all levels, leveraging the positive contributions of all, and using more inclusive planning approaches that facilitate social cohesion and create economic opportunities;
- (c) Understanding the impact of new technologies and the potential of open and accessible data, which require governance and design models that help ensure that no one is left behind;
- (d) Addressing the growing social and cultural inequalities and lack of access to economic opportunities in cities;
- (e) Responding to environmental degradation and climate change.

B. Recommendations

52. The participants encouraged the acceleration of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda through:

Frameworks

- (a) Encouraging the formulation of implementation frameworks for the New Urban Agenda at all levels, including monitoring mechanisms, provision of a coordinated space for effective contribution from all stakeholders, and alignment with the efforts and actions of the 2030 Agenda and other international, regional, national, subnational and local development frameworks;
- (b) Supporting the creation and consolidation of inclusive platforms and agendas for dialogue among all levels of government, decision-makers and stakeholders, such as regional, national and local urban forums and committees, to strengthen policy review and impact assessment, foster exchange of experiences and cooperation, and scale up voluntary commitments from and actions by all partners;
- (c) Developing and advocating for integrated territorial development, including the integration of sectoral policies, institutions and investment; integration across departments and levels of government; regional and urban-rural integration; improved coordination among actors; and enhanced alignment of national, subnational and local policies with international agendas;
- (d) Adapting mechanisms to be innovative and robust for the diversification and expansion of means of implementation in order to meet the need for the complex and integrated approaches promoted by the New Urban Agenda, which could require enhanced resources, including for technological innovations and improvements, research, capacity-building, technical assistance and partnership development;

Governance and partnerships

- (e) Adopting collaborative governance mechanisms that actively engage all levels of government and groups of society, including youth, women and grassroots organizations, in particular excluded, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This work in solidarity is critical to increasing engagement and fostering shared responsibility in promoting sustainable urban development, and to ensuring sustainability of results;

(f) Promoting multi-stakeholder, constituency-based coalitions to use the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to better prevent, prepare, and respond to urban crises;

Innovative solutions

(g) Fostering a culture of creativity and innovation, to be integrated into the functioning of cities and human settlements;

(h) Developing monitoring and data-collection mechanisms, including community-generated data, to enhance the availability of information and disaggregated, comparable data at the city, functional urban area and community levels to promote informed and evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation and the assessment of progress and impact at all levels;

(i) Creating an enabling environment and developing capacities to scale up good practices, including in municipal finance, sustainable private and public investments in urban development, and job creation, with a view to generating value while advancing the public good;

(j) Incorporating accessibility and universal design as core principles into national, subnational and local action plans for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda through inclusive, accessible and participatory processes and consultations.

53. The participants in the ninth session of the World Urban Forum recognized its value as an inclusive platform for collecting input from a broad range of stakeholders and contributing to annual and quadrennial progress reports on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

54. They called for further development of the role of UN-Habitat as a focal point within the United Nations system to support all countries and mobilize stakeholders in the implementation, follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda, including through scaled-up normative support.

55. The participants commended the Government of Malaysia, the city of Kuala Lumpur, and UN-Habitat for organizing the Forum, and expressed their commitment to providing continuous cooperation to the hosts of the tenth World Urban Forum, the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the city of Abu Dhabi.

C. Conclusions

56. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration and the proceedings of all main meetings held during the ninth session of the World Urban Forum informed the preparation of the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 and the related work programme.

57. Information from a participant survey, internal debriefings and the independent evaluation undertaken after the Forum will feed into the lessons learned and will be used in current and future World Urban Forum planning and implementation.

IV. Future sessions of the Forum

58. Building on the lessons learned from the ninth and previous sessions of the World Urban Forum, the WUF coordinating unit of the Advocacy, Outreach and Communication Branch of the Office of External Relations at UN-Habitat has begun preparations for the tenth session of the World Urban Forum, to be held in Abu Dhabi from 8 to 13 February 2020.

59. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates and the Abu Dhabi Department of Urban Planning and Municipalities signed a host country agreement with UN-Habitat on 17 October 2018, which will guide the preparations for the tenth session of the World Urban Forum.

60. In line with the request by the Committee of Permanent Representatives that it be actively involved and engaged in the preparatory process for the tenth session of the Forum, a first subcommittee meeting took place on 25 January 2019, to present the theme, request its approval, brief the members on progress made for the tenth session of the Forum and solicit general feedback on the preparations.

61. UN-Habitat will hold monthly briefings with the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and, as preparations gather momentum, more frequent meetings will be held to provide updates.

62. The theme of the tenth session of the Forum, chosen on the basis of input gathered from participants in the ninth Forum, will be “Cities of opportunities – connecting culture and innovation”.

63. To ensure effective coordination and contribution from the subprogrammes and regional offices of UN-Habitat, an interdivisional task force was established on 22 January 2019.
64. An engagement plan for the tenth session of the Forum has been created to guide the mobilization of other United Nations system entities based on their respective mandates and areas of expertise as they relate to the theme and sub-themes. On the basis of this engagement, the Forum will play a key role in the advancement of system-wide collaboration on sustainable urban development in line with the Secretary-General's reform of the United Nations system.
65. Regarding the hosting of the eleventh World Urban Forum, three cities submitted valid bids by the deadline of 15 January 2019.
66. The Executive Director has established a selection committee to evaluate the bids. The winning bidder will be announced during the first Habitat Assembly.
67. To foster results-oriented engagement among participants, a programme of events with innovative formats is being designed that includes a focus on strengthening private-sector and media engagement.
68. A new approach to the formulation of and follow-up to the declaration of the World Urban Forum is being designed to draft relevant shared outcomes that are evaluated after each session.
69. The new approach, based on lessons learned, will ensure that the World Urban Forum continues to evolve and adapt to global changes and remains the premiere global platform on sustainable urban development.

V. Additional information

70. More information on the ninth session of the World Urban Forum can be found at:
- Kuala Lumpur Declaration
(<http://wuf9.org/kuala-lumpur-declaration/>)
 - Daily summary bulletins
(<http://wuf9.org/daily-bulletins/>)
 - Archived photos
(<http://wuf9.org/media-centre/gallery/>)
 - Archived videos
(<http://wuf9.org/media-centre/watch-live/>)
-