The Future Saudi Cities Programme: A New Partnership to action UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda in Saudi Arabia

Riyadh, 19 December 2013: HRH Prince Mansour Bin Moteab Bin Abdel Aziz, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MOMRA) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Dr. Jon Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, have signed a four-year programme of cooperation agreement for the development of the "Future Saudi Cities" Programme. The four year Programme will be implemented by UN-Habitat in 17 cities in collaboration with the Ministry.

The signing ceremony of the programme was attended by Dr. Abdel Rahman Al-Sheikh, Under-secretary of Planning, Dr. Khaled Al-Nafai, Director of Research at MOMRA, The United Nations Acting Resident Coordinator and UNDP Acting Resident Representative, Mr. Paolo Limbo, UN-Habitat Director of Programme Division, Alioune Badiane, and UN-Habitat Regional Representative for Gulf States, Tarek El-Sheikh.

Speaking at the Ministry in Riyadh, the Minister encouraged UN-Habitat to provide a critical approach to the urbanization process in Saudi Arabia. It was agreed that UN-Habitat will provide technical assistance in evidence-based policy making and a system of data at national, regional and local levels on urban expansion, and balanced territorial planning with a focus on growth centers in small and medium sized towns.

In the press conference, Dr. Mansour Ben Mota'ab said that urbanization in Saudi Arabia is characterized by large population growth, a need to address the externalities of urban growth, spatial expansion higher than the global average in the large cities of Riyadh, Jeddah and Mekka and urban sprawl in others. H.R.H requested the Executive Director of UN-Habitat to assess the current state of development of Saudi cities, introduce new indicators for monitoring urban development and propose pilot quick-wins that can contribute to prosperity.

As complementary activities, the project will also address planning at the city-regional level, contribute to capacity development, and produce municipal projects implementation guidelines and mechanisms to address youth concerns, in particular youth unemployment, housing and new public spaces for youth activities with respect to culture and tradition.

As linked activities, UN-Habitat has been requested by the Ministry to strengthen the National Urban Observatory, give advice on new Planning Act and support in the update of 13 regional spatial plans.