First Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly

(27-31 May 2019 - Nairobi, Kenya)

Executive Director's Policy Statement

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Afternoon Plenary

27 May 2019, 3PM, Conference Room 2

Your Excellency Martha Delgado, President of First session of the UN-Habitat Assembly;
Distinguished Ministers and Mayors,
Heads of delegations and the newly elected members of the Bureau,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum

Good afternoon, Habari Ya Azuhuri

1. You are all here because of the urgency of the agenda before this Assembly. These issues are relevant and important to the world, they are meaningful in your own countries and communities. It is my sincere hope that the contribution that you will make and the guidance you will give to UN-Habitat and its partners, will help us become more efficient and effective in delivering our mandate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. The world is at a complex crossroads. Age old issues such as inequality in urban areas are now made more complex by climate change, conflicts and crises. This results in greater urban insecurity and mass migration.

3. We can harness the multiple opportunities offered by well-planned urbanization, form mutually-beneficial partnerships and develop technology-driven economic transformation. But we need new ideas and new ways of doing things if we want humanity to survive into the next century. We urgently need sustainable development models.

4. To address these issues, the international community responded in many different ways. The United Nations adopted far reaching global agendas. Some of the more familiar ones are the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement. In order to support the implementation of these agendas by national and local governments, UN-Habitat is responding with **four robust institutional pillars.** They are all supported by statistical evidence and policy analysis. These interventions that include flagship programmes and actions will reposition UN-Habitat as the "go-to global agency" for sustainable urbanisation. UN-Habitat will be a centre of excellence and innovation.

Distinguished Delegates,

5. Before, I present these pillars, allow me to express four key concerns.

6. **The first two have to do with inequality. There is a growing trend around inequality in cities and, I wish to provide stronger focus, between urban and rural settlements.** These are two key concerns within the continuum of human settlements, the basis for UN-Habitat's role, which is to ensure we a better quality of life for all in an urbanising world.

7. In 2016, soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, important progress was noticeable in various development areas. At that time, we lived in a world where: (i) more than 1 billion people had been lifted out of extreme poverty; (ii) child mortality and (iii) the number of out of school children had both dropped by more than half. Collectively, the world witnessed the most successful anti-poverty movement in history.

8. There is little doubt that the Millennium Development Goals achieved some significant results. But too many people are still left behind. Today, inequalities and poverty persist in both the developing and developed world. It is most visible in cities where populations are isolated and divided by physical location.

9. In the next 30 years, 70 per cent of the world's population will live in urban areas. Ninety-six per cent (96%) of urban growth will occur in less developed regions, particularly in East and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Urbanization in these parts of the world is largely unplanned, leading to the rapid expansion of informal or slum settlements.

10. Slums and informal settlements, which currently accommodate close to 1 billion people, are the physical evidence of urban poverty and inequality. Allow me to highlight a few figures:

- In 2015, about 2.3 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation services
- 1.2 billion people lack access to clean drinking water worldwide.
- Less than 35 per cent of the cities in developing countries have their waste-water treated.
- About 1.6 billion people globally live in inadequate housing.

11. Slums and rural places where disadvantages are greatest point to spatial inequalities in cities. They lead to other forms of social, economic and cultural inequalities. They severely limit political participation, threatening peaceful existence. The impact on women in vulnerable situations, persons with disabilities, older persons and youth is particularly bad.

12. We can see evidence of spatial inequality all around us. They include unequal access to public spaces, land, adequate and affordable housing. They also impact on job opportunities, basic urban and social services, mobility and public transport, with the poor and the weak physically segregated.

13.   Connected to these persistent urban issues are a set of emerging trends and conditions that include climate change, conflict and crisis, urban insecurity and migration, which need to be considered in planning and managing cities to make them inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

14.   **My third concern is about climate change and climate crisis**. One of the key emerging issues that cities have to contend with is climate change, which has been described as one of the greatest challenges of our time, with adverse impacts capable of undermining the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. Cities account for 60 to 80 per cent of the world's energy consumption and generate as much as 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. If we are to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030, as urged by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, then urgent and radical action is needed to transform our cities, towns, villages and homes. Things that we depend upon such as water, energy, transportation, wildlife, agriculture, ecosystems, and human health are experiencing the full effects of a changing climate.

15.   The list of climate change related disasters is endless. As recently as this year, and closer to us in Nairobi, Cyclones Idai and Kenneth caused one of the worst weather-related catastrophes in the history of Africa, killing at least 242 people in Mozambique, 139 people in Zimbabwe and 56 people in Malawi. This, added to waterborne diseases such as cholera, has left more than 800 people dead, and affected over 1.5 million people across the Southern-Africa region.

16.   **My fourth concern is about conflicts, crisis and urban insecurity**. Global conflicts and crises are increasingly complex, multi-dimensional, protracted and urban in nature, and their impact is particularly severe for the urban poor, and those already exposed to vulnerabilities.

17.   A major emerging urban issue is insecurity. Over the past two decades, urban population growth and the effects of globalisation have enhanced the complexities and manifestation of crime and violence in cities, which undermine the long-term sustainability of cities worldwide.

18.   The movement of people adds complexity to the numerous issues that cities and other human settlements must deal with. Currently, there are 763 million internal migrants and 224 million international migrants in the world. In addition, there are 25 million refugees and 40 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have fled conflict and crisis. The majority are not in humanitarian camps but seeking refuge in cities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19.   There have been a number of global responses to these issues.

20.   **The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a bold response to development challenges**. Indeed, in 2015, to respond to current and emerging challenges, the UN General Assembly adopted the SDGs.

21. At the heart of the SDGs lies SDG 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Goal 11 recognises the role of cities in transforming our world, given that two thirds of the world population will be living in cities by 2050. Getting cities right is more urgent than ever as cities drive national economies by creating prosperity, enhancing social development and providing employment. Achieving SDG 11 will enable Member States to advance Agenda 2030.

22. At UN-Habitat we believe that the battle for achieving the SDGs will be won or lost in cities. Cities are nodal points that are linked to towns, villages and the human settlement chain. Their density is a reflection of the economies of agglomeration. They link the economy, energy, environment, science, technology with social and economic outcomes. These interrelations are important to understand, in order to formulate integrated policies needed to achieve sustainable development. Cities are the nodal points in a web that connects all other goals. SDG #11 is therefore the 'docking station' of all the other SDGs.

23. **The key to achieving sustainable urbanisation is the New Urban Agenda. It is a strong contribution to sustainable urban development**. It represents a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future. Well-planned and well-managed, urbanization can be a powerful tool for sustainable development for both developing and developed countries.

24. Cities contribute about 80 per cent of global GDP, and function as catalysts, driving innovation, consumption, and investment worldwide,

making them a positive and potent force for addressing issues related to poverty, social exclusion and spatial inequality, shared prosperity, climate and the environment, and various forms of crisis.

25. Moreover, cities of opportunities use innovation to improve living conditions and make the most of the benefits offered by well-planned and well-managed urban areas. They use technological innovations to support the rise of smart cities or liveable cities, which are about smart governments and smart citizen participation that altogether contribute to enhance the quality of life and the performance of the city, particularly for the benefit of those more in need.

Excellencies,

26. In moving and in light of the concerns I have just expressed, UN-Habitat's policy response is structured around **four robust institutional pillars** that altogether aim to transform the governance, strategic and substantive focus of the organization and deliver a new UN-Habitat.

27. **The first pillar is the Strategic Plan 2020-2025**. In order to provide a strong and structured response to countries' demand in an integrated manner and accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda, UN-Habitat has formulated the Strategic Plan covering the period 2020-2025 that emphasises outcomes and impact to be expected from its work.

28.   The Strategic Plan 2020-2025 repositions UN-Habitat as a major global entity, a centre of excellence and innovation that (i) refocuses its niche as the thought leader and go-to agency setting the global discourse and agenda on sustainable urban development, (ii) drives political discussions, (iii) generates specialised and cutting-edge knowledge, (iv) shapes technical norms, principles and standards, and (v) acts as a multiplier in the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practices in getting cities and human settlements right.

29.   A strong focus on normative work places the organization in the framework of the reform of the United Nations Development System by emphasising its unique value proposition and demonstrating its readiness to contribute in a meaningful manner to the identification of regional and country problems, challenges and opportunities, associated to sustainable urban development.

30.   As a centre of excellence and innovation, UN-Habitat also advocates sustainable solutions through demonstration, pilot and innovative operational projects that can be adapted and taken to scale by countries and other partners, all the while ensuring that normative outcomes inform transformative operational solutions, and in turn field operations influence normative work.

31.   By catalysing networks of partners, including local authorities, and policy makers in leading the implementation of cutting-edge solutions, we will be able to bring about transformational change for the benefit of millions of people, ensuring that no one and no place is left behind.

32. The Strategic Plan lays out a revised vision and mission, with a sharper focus. Our new vision statement is "**A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world**".

33. Our mission is to "**promote transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action to leave no one and no place behind**".

34. By implementing the Strategic Plan 2020-2025, UN-Habitat will serve Member States, sub-national and local governments, and other key urban actors in the pursuit of four mutually reinforcing and integrated domains of change or goals:

- **Domain of change 1 is on "reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban - rural continuum".**
- **Domain of change 2 focuses on "enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions".**
- **Domain of change 3 is on "strengthened climate action and improved urban environment".**
- **Domain of change 4 focuses on "effective urban crisis prevention and response".**

35. Between these four (4) domains of change, twelve (12) strategic outcomes have been identified and the inclusive realisation of these

outcomes will incorporate the social inclusion dimensions of human rights, gender, women, children, youth, older persons and persons with disability in everything UN-Habitat does.

36. The Strategic Plan 2020-2025 will be implemented in an integrated manner in view of achieving lasting impact everywhere we are present. In this regard UN-Habitat is launching five flagship programmes:

▪ The first one is the **SDG cities programme**, which aims to support cities in identifying and undertaking actions needed to implement the New Urban Agenda and measure impacts in achieving SDG targets.

▪ The second one is the **Spatial inequalities, urban regeneration and renewal programme**, whose ultimate outcome is the reduction of spatial inequality through the inclusion and integration of disadvantaged socio-economic groups, diversification of the local economy and housing, infrastructure and service investments along the urban-rural continuum.

▪ The third flagship programme is the **Frontier technologies and urban innovation programme**, which aims to ensure that the smart cities field is focused on sustainable development outcomes, including human rights.

▪ The fourth one is the **Climate action for the urban poor programme**, which will work towards improving livelihoods by building adaptive capacities, providing risk-reducing infrastructure and an improved policy environment at local and national level to slowly but steadily support poverty alleviation.

- The fifth flagship programme is the **Migration and inclusive cities programme**, which will build on UN-Habitat's ongoing efforts to make cities socially inclusive and economically vibrant, while addressing urban-rural dynamics.

37. These flagship programmes will provide a robust combination of innovative normative approaches and sustainable operational solutions. They will be implemented over the course of the new Strategic Plan period for a combined estimated budget of USD 100 million.

38. UN-Habitat, in its role as a focal point for sustainable urban development in the United Nations system, will call upon all development actors, and stakeholders, including local and regional governments, civil society, private sector and academia at every scale, to work in concert to implement its Strategic Plan, including the five flagship programmes.

39. Moreover, important efforts are underway to rethink engagement with multilateral and regional development banks, emerging markets and the private sector to mobilise resources needed to carry out the work of the organization and leverage investments in sustainable urbanization.

40. Given that cities play a vital role in achieving the sustainable urban development agenda, UN-Habitat will reenergize its partnership with local authorities and their associations and city networks, and fully support their efforts in the local achievement and monitoring of the SDGs and the

implementation of the New Urban Agenda through work on policy, legislation, governance, planning and design, and financing mechanisms.

41.   Our work will be driven by the urgency to achieve impact like never before and transform lives in cities and communities for the better. In this regard, the Habitat Country Programme Document will be re-institutionalized as the overarching framework that (i) reflects countries' priorities in sustainable urban development; and (ii) brings focus, coherence and purpose to UN-Habitat's work everywhere it operates. In addition, we will invest in establishing a state-of-the-art monitoring and evaluation system as well robust communications, advocacy and outreach.

Distinguished Delegates,

42.   **The second pillar is an internal transformative change process.** In April 2018, UN-Habitat embarked on an internal transformative change process with the objective of making the organisation a trusted, transparent, and accountable UN agency, that operates effectively, efficiently, and collaboratively, and whose expertise is relevant, valued, and in demand.

43.   **The third pillar is the organizational restructuring.** In October 2018, we launched an organizational restructuring exercise based on a number of studies and evaluations that call for a more flexible and agile, yet robust structure to enable UN-Habitat to support Member States and development partners in the implementation, monitoring and review of the

SDGs and the New Urban Agenda in a more impactful manner. We are planning to have a new organisational structure in place by January 2020 to ensure effective implementation of the Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

44. The internal change process, which is graciously funded by Sweden and Norway also aligns the organisation with the overall United Nations reform agenda, including the reform of the UN Development System. In addition, it brings together all the components of the UN-Habitat transformation process. The internal change process represents our vision and hopes for a new UN-Habitat.

45. **Finally, the fourth pillar is the new governance architecture.** In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly passed a historic resolution (A/RES/72/226) that has transformed the governance and oversight architecture of UN-Habitat after 14 long years of discussions and uncertainty. This represents a major step forward in engagement, representation, accountability and institutional efficiency. This is the reason why we are gathered here in the first session of the UN Habitat Assembly.

Excellencies,

46. In concluding, I would like to urge you to take action today. As I said at the outset and as we can see all around us, the world is at a complex and life-changing crossroads. We can no longer say it is someone else's problem or that we are too weak and small to take up the challenge. The

time for collective and decisive action is now. We can do it and we can leverage on the benefits of sustainable urbanization, not only to get our cities right but to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas. Now is not the time to give up and look the other way, for it is our children who are urging us and telling us we cannot wait. If we genuinely work together to implement impact focused initiatives, using innovative financing and coalitions, we can raise millions out of poverty and significantly reduce exclusion and inequalities in our cities and communities.

47. I call upon us all to take action today. Please share your ideas and solutions, dedicate more time and resources to positively transform our world. The road ahead may be challenging but I assure you all, We, in UN-Habitat, will walk with you.

I thank you for your attention.
Asante Sana