

First UN-Habitat Assembly, 27 – 31 May 2019

Remarks by Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Introductory Statement of the Executive Director for the High Level Strategic Dialogue on the special theme for the First Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly

Wednesday, 29 MAY 2019 at approx. 10AM, 6.5 minutes, CR1

**Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. The report HSP/HA/1/6 explores the theme of the first session of the UN-Habitat Assembly of “Innovation for better quality of life in cities and communities”, with the sub-theme “Accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”.

2. The report presents basic facts and figures on innovative approaches to sustainable urban development and looks at promising practices with regard to innovation for sustainable cities and communities, innovation as an institutional enabler, and opportunities for expanding innovation in the work of UN-Habitat. Finally, it proposes key issues for discussion.

Two questions that you may probably ask are what is innovation in the context of the work of UN-Habitat? And why do we care so much about it that we have made innovation the central theme of our first UN-Habitat Assembly?

3. Innovation, in the context of sustainable urban development, is defined as the activities and processes of creating and implementing new knowledge and solutions to improve living conditions for all in cities and communities.

4. Cities are the physical manifestation of history and culture and incubators of innovation, industry, technology, entrepreneurship and creativity. They drive national economies by creating prosperity, enhancing social development and providing employment, but they can also be breeding grounds for poverty, exclusion and environmental degradation.

5. Consequently, if the argument that the battle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be won or lost in cities is to hold true, cities will have to continue to drive innovation in ground-breaking ways to achieve a lasting impact in communities and to ensure that no one is left behind, as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Excellencies,

In introducing the theme of this first Assembly, allow me to share **one important message** and invite us to reflect **on 5 key questions**.

6. My message is about UN-Habitat's unwavering commitment to innovate in everything we do, including in the ways we partner.

7. As, I have mentioned on Monday and Tuesday, UN-Habitat is repositioning as a major global entity, a centre of excellence and innovation. As the thought leader and

go-to agency that sets the global discourse and agenda on sustainable urban development, our ambition is to generate innovative, specialized and cutting-edge knowledge.

8. We will use spatial, economic, social and environmental data to generate knowledge that will influence sustainable urban development policies and strategies at the national and local levels. Our approaches are based in years of experience, which have shown that prosperity and the sustainable transformation of cities and regions are driven by the ability of decision makers to understand and use data to guide policies and strategies.

9. The investment of UN-Habitat in innovative knowledge generation and management methodologies is grounded in the understanding that lasting impact in the lives of people around the world can be achieved through the uptake by countries and cities of state-of-the-art norms, standards, guidelines in the areas of sustainable urban development, in response to the 2030 Agenda promise of leaving no one and no place behind. Innovation and contextual approaches that take into account local circumstances are fundamental to the interventions of UN-Habitat.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. The prosperity of cities and regions is not an accident. It comes from a clear vision and planning, leadership, effective institutional coordination, adequate implementation and the measurement of results, as well as sustainable use of innovative and smart solutions. To effectively use innovation to improve quality of life in cities and communities and accelerate implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, a number of issues need to be

considered at the global, national and local level. For this reason as we start this high level strategic dialogue on the theme of the assembly, I would like us to reflect of the following 5 questions:

1. How can cities promote smart urban technologies that can handle the major systems a city requires — water, transport, security, solid waste, green buildings and clean energy — to improve quality of life for all?
2. What are the national requirements for countries to create an environment that encourages innovative solutions to issues of spatial inequality and poverty, prosperity of cities and regions, climate action and crisis in urban settings?
3. How should national institutions be reinforced so that they are better able to integrate new knowledge and solutions into established systems in the communities they serve?
4. What could be the role of UN-Habitat in engaging with actors in the smart cities field to ensure that the smart city vision becomes more inclusive, towards a city vision that is compact, connected and sustainable, in sum liveable cities?
5. What role could UN-Habitat play in assessing and advising on the innovation capacity of cities around the world?

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am looking forward to a fruitful and action-oriented debate

Thank you for your attention.