

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

High Level Political Forum Side Event: Delivering Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation under the Current Climate Change Scenario – Innovative Responses from South-South Cooperation and Water Operators' Partnerships

Co-Organized by the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation and the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance/UN-Habitat with the support of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished CPRs,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank Our member State, Tajikistan for their kind Hosting of this side event together with UN-Habitat for the second year in the row and for their dedicated leadership in the Friends of Water movement which, since 2010, has built wide backing for water issues among UN member states.

I am also very grateful to the UN Office for South South Cooperation for co-organizing, and to UNDESA for their strong support in making this event happen.

Today we are facing two MEGA-trends — rapid urbanisation and climate change — both of which, depending on how they are managed, have unprecedented implications for planetary sustainability. Neither of these challenges can be taken lightly. As the UN Secretary General said during the recent Abu Dhabi Climate Meeting, the world is now facing a grave climate emergency.

By 2050, cities will be home to some 6.3 billion people – this is 2.4 billion more urban inhabitants than today. This growth is overwhelmingly concentrated in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

If you look at a world map, there is a good deal of overlap between zones of rapid urbanization and those destined to bear the biggest brunt of climate change.

The October 2018 IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C stated that the earth's surface had already warmed to 1°C, enough to lift oceans and unleash a crescendo of deadly storms, floods and droughts. At current levels of greenhouse gas emissions, the temperatures are likely to rise by 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052, resulting in increased climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth.

Cities located in coastal areas of the tropics, where we find many of the fastest-growing cities of the world, are particularly vulnerable to cyclones that have increased in number and intensity in recent decades. The Fourth IPCC Assessment Report predicts a continued increase of such storms in the future, which will pose even greater risks to coastal settlements, including the small island states of the Pacific and Caribbean.

But Inland cities are also vulnerable, to flooding or - where climate change is expected to result in reduced precipitation - to drought, reduced water tables and food scarcity.

Within these communities, it is the poor who tend to lack access to affordable and quality basic services, and who live in substandard housing often on steep slopes and other risk-prone areas, that are particularly exposed to the ravages of climate change and least resilient to respond.

Not only are cities vulnerable to climate change, they are also contributors to it. The cities of today generate up to 70% of global GHG emissions through their activities and consumption. Inefficient basic services, and unsustainable consumption patterns, aggravated by major wealth inequalities, make many of the cities of today part of the problem.

But it doesn't have to be like this. Cities have enormous potential to move away from carbon and to embrace resilience. In different ways, in cities all over the world, we are seeing it happen. What's more, these climate sensitive modes of community and city development are more sustainable and inclusive than today's dominant model. They move us towards SDG 11, in which safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities and communities allow for human flourishing.

In UN-Habitat's new strategic plan 2020-2023 that was recently adopted at the first UN Habitat Assembly held in Nairobi this May, we strive to support member states and local governments around the world, to guide urbanization that is both low-carbon and resilient. Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment is a pillar of our new strategy, and ALL of our programming is designed with a climate lens – be it in mobility, urban planning, public space, energy, water and sanitation or housing.

We put particular attention on helping increase the resilience of poor urban communities that are the most exposed to climate risks through our Flagship Programme on Addressing the Most Vulnerable first - Climate Action for the Urban Poor. To date, UN-Habitat has piloted an integrated 'climate action in informal settlements' approach in five countries. We have also developed climate change tools and methodologies and helped to shape a unique global partnership for policy and advocacy in the efforts to support the UN Secretary General's Climate Summit.

With support from the Government of Norway, we are currently developing a Climate Proofing Toolkit for Basic Urban Infrastructure, with a focus on Water and Sanitation. The Toolkit will offer guidance to policy-makers, planners and service providers on how to undertake climate change sensitivity and vulnerability assessments and to identify possible ways of integrating climate actions and responses into basic urban infrastructure planning and investment.

But climate change, as we know, is above all a hydrological change, and water and sanitation services are the first to be affected. Severe water shortages, unprecedented hot weather in cooler regions of the world and the cyclones that recently hit Mozambique are now everyday news. In many ways, the time to act seems to have passed and we have to make up for lost time. The question is how?

Water utilities can no longer count on the quantity and quality of water that they have planned around for decades, and some of them are realizing this as their populations soar.

On a hot summer's day like this one, we don't need reminding how important water and sanitation services are for healthy cities and communities. Water and Sanitation service providers are on the front lines for delivering on SDG 6, the water goal. But their work also provides vital support to the achievement of all other SDGs, from SDG 1 on poverty to SDG2 on hunger, SDG 11 on Cities and SDG 13 on climate change.

It is for this, that we are proud at UN-Habitat to lead the Global Water Operators' Partnership Alliance (GWOPA). This is a network in which water operators worldwide share knowledge and engage in not-for-profit peer partnerships.

In Water Operators Partnerships, strong utilities mentor others needing support to improve their capacity to provide quality services that are more efficient, inclusive, resilient. Our GWOPA team, working in collaboration with utilities and national and regional water and sanitation associations worldwide, have helped enable over 300 of these partnerships since 2007 when former Secretary General, Kofi Annan's Advisory Board for Water and Sanitation requested UN-Habitat to establish this network.

A growing number of these partnerships are helping utilities mitigate, or adapt to climate change. On the mitigation side, utilities are working with each other to increase energy efficiency, reduce energy intensive water losses, reuse water in innovative ways, and even develop the capacity to generate energy from wastewater.

On the adaptation side, the Partnerships are helping utilities prepare for deregulated hydrological regimes through innovative water planning, water safety planning, recycling and reuse schemes and by valuing and investing in nature-based infrastructure to restore watersheds and dampen climatological variations. Furthermore, they are helping build utilities' resiliency through greater capacity to provide inclusive and reliable services to ensure that everyone in cities and communities benefits from improved resilience.

What is particularly uplifting, is that 60% of these partnerships are happening between utilities in developing countries. These partnerships between nearby peer utilities are particularly effective since these service providers often share common challenges, and the solutions they come up with tend to fit better to the local context. Some are even leapfrogging right over service provision technologies that don't withstand climate scrutiny, such as expanding access to sanitation without depending so heavily on water intensive flush based systems. For this reason, we are very happy to have this event in collaboration with UNOSSC and we look forward to hearing more examples.

On this note, please let me wish us all a constructive session