

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

**High Level Event – Placing Well-being at the heart of Climate Policy: Accelerating
mitigation actions and achieving well-being benefits at the United Nations Climate
Action Summit 2019**

Monday 23 September 2019 at the United Nations Headquarters, New York

Question:

What are the opportunities for a focus on well-being to further advance progress on mitigation and adaptation in urban contexts?

Answer:

As you know, before joining UN-Habitat, I was Mayor in Penang, Malaysia. The daily concerns of citizens offer very concrete opportunities to start a dialogue on climate change, its impact on the quality of life in cities and the action we need to take. Citizens knock at your door to talk about air pollution, traffic jams, lack of green, and solid waste. We need to make the connection with climate change in our daily engagement with citizens.

A focus on the quality of life is very much aligned with the well-being lens put forward in the OECD report. UN-Habitat’s vision is exactly that: “A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world”, under which we are developing a strong focus on climate action.

A city is a place where everything comes together in the built and natural environment that surrounds us, in which our children go to school, in which we work, live and play. Managing a city means finding urban solutions that address a wide range of concerns and seize opportunities. At UN-Habitat, and as set out in the New Urban Agenda, we believe in the transformative power of urbanization.

If we get our cities right, we plan and manage them properly, SDG11, we will go a long way in achieving other SDG goals and target.

This means when we plan our cities, we need to make sure we maximize the impact on overall health, our overall well-being and mitigate climate change. This requires mobilizing everyone in the conversation. Planning is as much about today as it is about the opportunities and well-being of the next generation. The global Climate Strike on Friday was incredibly inspiring. We need to involve children and youth today in our planning efforts. They know what is at stake and they ask us to act. Let’s do so.

One example. How we plan, design and shape our neighborhoods can maximize the walkability of our neighborhoods and minimize the needs for mobility: to get from home to school, from home to work, from home to shops, and from home to play. If we combine this with greening our neighborhoods and public spaces, we will reduce air pollution and increase the overall quality of life, while contributing to mitigation efforts. It is an easier discussion to

focus on greening than on reducing emissions. Cycling and walking are the best modes of urban mobility with the biggest contribution to climate mitigation.

Let me turn to the second part of your question. The negative impact of climate change is already here and the already vulnerable are the most affected. We need an equal focus on adaptation, and I agree that the well-being lens is equally very useful.

Nowhere is the impact of climate change felt more harshly than in developing countries and in particular by over 880 million urban poor living in informal settlements and slums.

We have identified over 140 hotspots where the climate resilience of the urban poor is at risk. From Freetown in Sierra Leone, to Chittagong in Bangladesh to several small towns in Haiti.

We need to focus on the most vulnerable. What is central to the SDGs “Leaving No One Behind” tends to get lost in the global fight against the climate emergency. We need to mobilize climate finance for the resilience of the urban poor. This will result in sustainable development co-benefits, helping to lift families out of urban poverty.

Organized communities, such as those part of Shack/Slum Dwellers International, are often adept at adaptation and should be full development partners – not passive ‘beneficiaries’ of top-down interventions.

My final message is very simple. The focus of people in slums is on the well-being of their families. We need to build their climate resilience to give them a chance. There is only one way to do this effectively. We need to put the urban poor at the center of the process and empower them