

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

**World Habitat Day 2019: “Frontier technologies as innovative tool to transform waste  
to wealth”**

**Monday 7 October 2019 at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City**

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**Your Excellency Minister Román Meyer Falcón,  
Deputy Minister Martha Delgado Peralta,  
Mexico City Minister of Environment,  
Ms. Marina Robles Garcia,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to celebrate this year’s Global Observance of World Habitat Day with you all here in Mexico City. I would like to thank the Government of Mexico for moving so quickly to arrange this wonderful event and in particular Minister Falcon and our dear colleague Deputy Minister Peralta better known to us at UN-Habitat as the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly. I also want to thank Mexico City and Mayor Pardo for all the support and for arranging such an amazing location.

Every year, on World Habitat Day, we focus the world’s attention on a crucial subject concerning our cities. As a former Mayor, I know one of the major challenges for any urban area is the increasing amounts of waste that our every growing cities generate. Last year we had the Global Observance in Nairobi and discussed Solid Waste Management. This year we want to turn the challenges into opportunities with our topic “Frontier technologies as innovative tool to transform waste to wealth”.

Innovation is at the heart of the new UN-Habitat that we are now building with the support of Member States. As Deputy Minister Delgado knows well – the theme of our UN-Habitat Assembly was innovation and we were overwhelmed by the dynamic new ideas that participants came up with.

We are facing a global waste management challenge on a global scale that requires urgent action. Our cities produce 7 to 10 billion tonnes of waste a year and we don’t know what to do with it. The current rubbish collection services don’t even reach half of the urban population in low-income countries. A third of global waste is still openly dumped, only a small proportion – around 20 per cent is being recycled. In addition than three quarters of our wastewater is discharged into the world’s rivers and oceans without any form of treatment.

We all know the consequences of this. Mounting piles of rubbish threaten our environment and the health of our planet and our population. This is where we need the innovation not only to safely manage the waste – but to find the value in it and turn waste into wealth, for example through upcycling, buy-back and waste-to-energy schemes.

Technology provides us exciting opportunities to transform our waste management systems into sustainable ones. We can create a circular economy where resources undergo transformation and retain or even increase their value. This is not a utopian dream, many cities have demonstrated how this can be done.

Apart from having a positive impact on our cities, managing our rubbish properly can play an important role in combating climate change, as it has the potential to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 20 percent.

Improved waste management has both local and global benefits. This is why, during last year's World Habitat Day, President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and I launched the "Waste Wise Cities Campaign". By building a global network of partners who can exchange knowledge and best practices, we can tackle the waste management challenge and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda particularly using . new technologies and innovation.

As part of Waste Wise Cities Campaign, we recently called for innovative solutions that have the potential to transform waste to wealth. We received over 230 submissions from all around the world and have twenty best practices, that we are featuring on our social media. These include turning water hyacinth, a weed choking many of our lakes into envelopes and packaging bags, using old phone covers to create novelty electrical wall switches, trading waste for cash, health insurance or food stamps, and using artificial intelligence to support waste separation and recycling.

Finally, I want to convey my sincere thanks to our esteemed hosts, the United Mexican States and his Excellency the Minister, the Deputy Minister for hosting the World Habitat Day. We look forward to engaging with all of you in working towards transforming waste into wealth around the world.

Thank you.