

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

Grassroot Assembly at the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum

Monday 14 October 2019 at SETIA Spice Convention Centre, Penang

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to APUF7, and welcome to Penang!

I am very happy to be here with you at this Grassroot Assembly. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this event.

I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), Huairou Commission, SDI and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing & Organizing (WIEGO) for organising this Assembly. I understand that several of you have been very active in the preparations for APUF. I would like to thank you for this important contribution.

I would like to share with you three key messages today.

First, I would like us to recall the New Urban Agenda and the commitment made by all countries to work towards the vision of “cities for all” and “the equal use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements”. It was made clear in the New Urban Agenda that all countries should seek to promote inclusivity and ensure that all inhabitants are able to live in just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements.

Still, today, we see widespread social and economic divide in our cities and communities. We are constantly challenged with how to achieve inclusiveness and minimize inequality in the society. I would like to acknowledge the importance of this Assembly. This will be the space for the leadership of organized grassroots communities to share experience, strategies and tools on how you are working to improve the quality of life in your respective cities and communities. I hope you will show how we can facilitate bottom-up opportunities that are essential to realizing Cities for ALL and the Cities We Need.

We need to do much more to facilitate urban poor communities, informal workers and achieve gender equality. Only then can our cities become truly inclusive, resilient and sustainable. By implementing the commitments of the New Urban Agenda, we can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge the adverse impacts from climate change, in which poor communities are often located in the most vulnerable parts of the city and experience the worst effects. Especially in the Asia-Pacific region, we are increasingly faced with disasters due to climate change – both in frequency and impact.

This will only require more of us, both in our efforts to build resilience as well as our recovery and rehabilitation. In adapting to this new context, we need to place communities at the heart of our programmes. Community ownership and engagement via full participation in

decision-making is the only way to successfully raise human dignity. It is also the only way to the build social cohesion and trust that is necessary for long-term impact and resilience.

Finally, I want to highlight that your active participation and voices are crucial in developing a people-centred perspective to address the structural challenges of urban poverty and inequality. I look forward to receiving your recommendations in the “Declare Your Actions” session on the closing day of APUF.

At UN-Habitat, we want to feature practical and strategic actions to improve living and working conditions in informal settlements and the informal economy. We want to ensure that urban poor communities are well organized and federated so that their claims and plans for decent lives, livelihoods and opportunities in the urban space are advanced and realized. I assure you of my support to your work towards this goal. I hope to work hand in hand with you to facilitate action for an inclusive urbanization process for all.

Once again, I would like to commend you for convening the Grassroots Assembly today and providing a regional platform to discuss the way forward in supporting grassroots stakeholders to fully enjoy the socio-economic development in cities.

Before I close, let me also extend my warmest invitation to you to participate at the Tenth World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi from 8 – 13 February 2020. This will be next big milestone as we continue to advance in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. I hope to see you there.

I wish you the best in your discussions and a fruitful week here at APUF7.

Thank you very much.