

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

**Local Government Assembly at the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum**

**Monday 14 November 2019 at SETIA Spice Convention Centre, Penang**

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**Honourable Mayors,  
Governors,  
Local government representatives,**

Welcome to the 7th Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, and welcome to Penang!

As you all know, this year, according to the official statistics, more than 2.3 billion people in the Asia Pacific region now live in urban areas. Moreover, an additional 1.2 billion will move into cities in this region between now and 2050. This means a majority of the region's population is now urban.

This trend has profound implications for the region's economy, society and environment. The need to take a long-term vision and ensure that our cities are better planned, managed and financed is becoming ever more important. We must protect the environment and leave no one and no place behind.

We do not deny the importance of working together at the national level to ensure global alignment and commitment to support the Sustainable Development Goals. But if we want effective localisation of the SDGs, we need to convince mayors and local governmental officials by explaining to them how they can contribute towards the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs.

Let me explain to you on the 'how'. As a former mayor, I understand the demand placed on you as city leaders. How we implement global agendas will have significant implications for the day-to-day action of local governments, from sustainable urbanisation, to urban financing, to climate resilience, to running reliable, affordable and effective basic urban services.

During my time, we worked very hard to ensure that global organisations like the United Nations did not leave us out. We needed guidance and technical assistance to firstly understand what is the New Urban Agenda and how I can apply it in my city. Will it help me develop the right kind of policies and action plans? Who do I refer to when I need step-by-step guidance?

Ladies and gentlemen,

I know from firsthand experience that it is possible for a mayor to take bold steps and use creativity when finding resources to improve living conditions in one's city. Municipal finance for example continues to be a challenge. There is money all around us, I recall a councillor telling me. "But the mayor does not know how to collect it." The first step is to win over the trust of citizens by being transparent and accountable. The second step is being creative in finding ways to use technology to ensure equitable allocation of resources. Thirdly, one must learn to optimise state-owned assets with proper planning to attract long term investors.

Let me assure you that UN-Habitat is the “go-to” organisation for mayors if they need normative guidance - this means help on municipal finance and revenue generation; housing and building back better; and more recently, from our re-cent coordinating role, on Infrastructure, cities and local action, we will be reaching out to 150 hot spot cities focusing on climate adaptation and the urban poor.

We believe that the New Urban Agenda can inspire and foster local and national action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. If you base your city’s development plans on the SDGs, if you invest in data collection to ensure in-formed decision-making, half the battle is already won. You can develop and identify the priorities for your city. From this, you can develop action plans that will help you demonstrate good governance, identify what type of capacity building your city needs and also the innovation that you need to invest in including in technology.

My fellow mayors,

Not only are your voices important, you are at the forefront when implementing the relevant global agendas. We hope that this Local Government Assembly brings innovative ideas to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2030, working in synergy for sustainable cities and communities.

Let me take the opportunity to extend my warmest invitation to you to participate at the Tenth World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi from 8 – 13 February 2020. Please also consider joining the Local Voluntary Review programme that is now led by New York City, Helsinki and Mannheim. 16 other cities have agreed to showcase their achievements and more importantly share with the rest of the world their strategies and action plans. They are also keen to learn from each other and from you on how you are localising the SDGs and implementing the NUA.

I have every confidence that, by working together, we will find innovative and feasible solutions along with member states, partners, and the UN System in advancing for a better life for all in an urbanizing world. Do reach out to our UN-Habitat team if you need to know more about our flagship programme called SDG cities. It is part of our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan and provides a wealth of information on ‘how to’ ensure your city and your leadership will help the world achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Let us commit ourselves to this new decade of actions!

Thank you.