

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

Youth and Children Assembly at the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum

Monday 14 October 2019 at SETIA Spice Convention Centre, Penang

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Youth and Children's Assembly, taking place as a pre-forum event in conjunction with the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this event.

I am so happy to be here today with all of you, youth from around the world.

We are here to showcase and celebrate the enormous potential of youth and young people's capacity to embrace change and innovation. We are reliant on you to make sure that we all work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

As we countdown to SDG 2030, we are working hard to ensure coordinated efforts in this next decade of action. We need to begin this effort with all of you as you make up the largest generation. With over 1.8 billion young people in the world, your discussions over this week are very crucial indeed. We need you to advocate and to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. We also need to urge national governments to invest more in young people and put education first.

Children and youth, is a group, not a topic. We have to move beyond talking about youth but instead discuss global and regional challenges with youth. Despite the fast-growing rate of urbanisation, 35% of South Asia urban population are young people living in slums. Urban poverty is becoming a severe, pervasive and still under-acknowledged feature of modern life. It reflects the challenges in governance and weaknesses in the decision-making process.

Global estimates indicate that there are more than 100 million street children around the world and between 700,000 to 1 million people, mostly women and girls, are trafficked round the world each year. The world is undergoing changes and challenges, in which it is important for leaders to work with young people.

UN-Habitat is one of the first UN agencies to have youth focused and youth driven programmes. In Africa, we have established 9 One Stops catering to 350,000 youths with the most successful being in Kimisagara (Rwanda) and Mathare; we also have similar youth training hubs at Kismayo (Somalia) and Mogadishu.

We look to young people as positive agents of change which the world needs now. This Assembly is the perfect chance to raise your voice and send out a strong message: what are your aspirations, highlight your concerns. Use this forum to send out a strong message to the world so that your parents and your leaders of your country can listen to your aspirations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Youth are a resource, in fact that most important and strategic resource a country can have. They are job-creators and not merely job-seekers. Our Global Youth Fund, which is now 9 years old, provides support for 284 youth groups in 66 countries and 172 cities. It comprises 549 social enterprises and engages up to 68,000 individuals. In the Rajo/Hope project in Somalia, despite the most difficult situations, 500 young men and women have been trained in construction, ICT and entrepreneurship.

Youth are agents of social change; they take on a very active role in addressing the issues that affect them. Through the World Urban Youth Council Network (WUYC), we have 30 countries with representative bodies affiliated with the network. We have examples of many youth led processes that are working and making a difference in society even with minimal resources. What is required is to provide initiatives with an enabling environment that will facilitate their replication.

We believe in youth-led programmes particularly those involving the most vulnerable groups including in peace building and migration. To date, UN-Habitat has provided support for the World Humanitarian Summit on Youth, as well as the Urban Peace Labs.

I encourage you to continue to be active and creative, innovative and break “barriers”, and use your energy and potential to make our societies better. Let me conclude this by extending my warmest invitation to you to participate at the Tenth World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi from 8 – 13 February 2020. I wish you the best proceedings during today’s discussions and a fruitful week here at APUF7.

Thank you very much.