



**Speech by the Executive Director, UN-Habitat, on the occasion of Dialogue
2 – Implementing the New Urban Agenda to drive Sustainable Change,
Tenth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10)**

Excellencies,

Honorable Ministers,

Honorable Mayors,

Friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you! As-salam alaykom. Sabah el Kheir

Welcome to Dialogue 2 on the “Implementation of the New Urban Agenda to drive Sustainable Change”.

The Dialogues allow us to discuss the innovative means to drive change. They help to shape the overall outcome of the World Urban Forum.

I am impressed with the high quality of the speakers. Indeed, we need thought leadership.

We also need governments—both national and local—to champion the way forward.

As a former mayor, I particularly look forward to hearing from other mayors, who are turning policy, through planning, into concrete action and impact. I also look forward to the voices of those speaking for the urban poor who are at risk of being left behind.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has recognized that urbanization is one of the important mega trends that requires a ‘whole of UN’ approach. The presence in this dialogue of so many UN colleagues, and of course the World Bank is encouraging.

On the 22nd of January the Secretary-General reminded the Member States of the General



Assembly that: **“Geopolitical tensions, the climate crisis, global mistrust and the downsides of technology can jeopardize every aspect of our shared future. We must address these four 21st-century challenges with 21st-century solutions.”** We must mobilize and increase our ambition and ideas for solutions.

Part of that requires building a global coalition for fairer globalization. Again, as the Secretary-General said: “We have a plan. It’s called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and we all pledged to make it a reality”.

In response he launched the **Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030** is a real call to action. I hope that the World Urban Forum will also be a call to action and a full-scale mobilisation.

It has been said before. The battle for Sustainable Development and Climate Action, will be won or lost in cities. Where the Agenda 2030, sets clear common goals and targets, the New Urban Agenda gives us the how.

This is the key message of this Dialogue. The implementation of the New Urban Agenda can ensure that urbanization is a truly transformative force that drives sustainable change. If we get our cities right, we transform the way we live our lives, we can scale climate action, and we can maximize migration as a positive contribution. This will take us a long way toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today, **panel one** will focus on how we can generate the ambition, innovation and solutions to deliver for everyone, everywhere, leaving no one and no place behind. And—if you will forgive me for acknowledging my roots—leaving no mayor behind.

Panel two will focus on climate change and resilience. We need commitments and action



that will make a difference. The Secretary-General was very clear, and I quote: “We face an existential climate crisis. Our planet is burning.” I ask all of you to speak to this global challenge, to be bold, to think ‘out of the box’ and to share solutions that can work at scale. I am delighted to welcome honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji. He is a true climate champion, speaking on behalf of populations whose very existence is at risk. The transition from a mayor in Penang, Malaysia, to my current role as Executive Director of UN-Habitat, has so far been a very rich experience. As a mayor, I have had the chance to speak at the UN, calling for global commitments that would make a difference in the lives of local people. Global commitments require adaptation to local contexts. And cultural diversity allows us to anchor action in local values.

I said earlier that The New Urban Agenda gives us the ‘how’. We need to go further in drawing from our experiences and develop a concrete action framework that focuses on where we can make the biggest difference.

We are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, we are off track for achieving sustainable urbanization as set out in the New Urban Agenda. In the next few decades we are due to build as many cities as we have over the last 2,000 years. However, in contrast to the cities of the past, our new cities are increasingly exclusive rather than inclusive; more car-oriented and sprawling rather than compact and sustainable.

At UN-Habitat, urbanization is not just about big cities. It has the potential to transform territories, to connect cities and towns of all sizes, and tie in their hinterlands. Urbanization is a process that reaches beyond city boundaries.

As set out in the New Urban Agenda, **National Urban Policies** are a critical instrument for guiding territorial transformation. But they cannot be standalone—they must be linked to national development planning and budgeting. The UN system has to provide better integrated policy support to Member States. In that vein we stand ready to work with the



Resident Coordinators, the Regional Commissions and our sister agencies, such as UNDP.

For cities and local governments to deliver on their potential, we should not underestimate the importance of an enabling institutional environment. Central to this is developing **multi-governance mechanisms**, aligning who does what at what level, fostering a climate of collaboration across levels of governments and sectors. They should encourage also the needed partnerships beyond government.

The way we plan, build and shape our cities really matters. **Urban and territorial planning, urban design** cannot be left to the private sector alone. In addition, those that are urbanizing fastest often have the weakest systems and capacities in place to plan their growth.

We need to transform our cities to maximize climate mitigation efforts. At the same time, we need to focus on adaptation to confront the unavoidable climate impact. We will need to work with nature, not against it. The focus on nature-based solutions is timely. This presents an excellent opportunity for stronger collaboration with other UN agencies, in particular our neighbour in Nairobi, UN Environment.

However, our efforts often come to a standstill around the question of how we will pay for a green transition. It is important that we shift this discussion to one about **financing**, about investing in a greener more sustainable future. We need to put in place **appropriate financial frameworks** that blend different financial flows. Mayors know very well that **domestic resource mobilisation** can go a long way as long as people see value for their money.

In the end, the only thing that really matters, is **local implementation**. We need to rethink how we can get people really involved from setting the common agenda, to planning, to implementation. This is not an easy task as mistrust in government seems to be at an historic high. Moreover, people all too easily deny the lifestyle shifts that climate change requires.



We need to build a **new inclusive social compact**.

One way of doing so is to ensure that our actions are driven by **evidence-based decision making and plan-led development**. Local data and evidence matter. Disaggregated data gives us a better understand on how inequality translates itself spatially and who and where are at risk of being left behind.

This brings me back to the main theme of this World Urban Forum: “driving sustainable urbanization through culture and innovation”.

Local cultures and contexts offer concrete solutions for dealing with global challenges. However, globalization has pushed us into the opposite: **blueprint planning and building**, in which standardized models are copied from one continent to the other. This has to change. Global solutions need to be shaped by local realities and cultures. I do hope to hear from the panels on what it takes to do this.

UN-Habitat stands ready to do its part, collaborating in new ways, sharing knowledge and practices, and increasing our collective impact.

Thank you and I look forward to the results of this Dialogue.