



Valuing our communities and cities

UN-Habitat Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif
World Cities Day 2020
31 October 2020

Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, Urban Development and Public Works, Republic of Kenya, Hon. James Wainaina Macharia

Director-General United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), Her Excellency Madam. Zainab Hawa Bangura

Party Secretary of Shanghai Hon. Li Qiang

Mayor of Shanghai, People's Republic of China, Honourable Gong Zheng

Chief Minister of Penang, Malaysia, His Excellency, Chow Kon Yeow

Mayor of Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation, Honourable Alexander Vysokinsky

Chairman Council of Governors, Kenya Honourable Wycliffe Ambetsa Oparanya,

The Governor of Nakuru County, Republic of Kenya (and Chair of the Urban Development, Planning, Housing, Infrastructure, and Energy Committee of Kenya's Council of Governors,) Hon. Lee Kinyanjui

Ministers, Ambassadors, Mayors

Friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

I wish to send you all warm and friendly greetings. And to send a special greeting to everyone from our host city Nakuru.

Karibu Nakuru kwa mkutano wa mtandao!

This Global Observance of World Cities Day is unlike any we have seen before. Last year, as you know, we were in Ekaterinburg, in the Russian Federation having face-to-face discussions with hundreds of colleagues.

COVID-19 has made us more innovative, but I must admit, that I do miss meeting all of you in person. Although we are forced to stay at home, UN-Habitat has been busy, trying to find ways to keep us all connected.

I am also aware that a digital divide is keeping us apart. More than 1.5 billion people have no adequate shelter, and these communities have no way of staying digitally connected. They cannot stay at home, much less work from home.

This is why, the theme of World Cities Day 2020 is about appreciating our communities and cities. UN-Habitat is grateful to the Government of Kenya and the city of Nakuru for hosting the global observance of World Cities Day 2020, the first in the African continent.

It is in recognition of cities like Nakuru, where the bond between urban and rural communities are strongest, we will find the best model for the socio-economic recovery from the pandemic.

Let me take this opportunity, to recognise the contribution of the Government of the People's Republic of China, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government, for their continued support to UN-Habitat's advocacy of the New Urban Agenda. Shanghai, the first city to host the global observance of World Cities Day, is doubling their efforts to localise the SDGs, in line with the UN's Decade of Action.

This year's World Cities Day theme – Valuing our Communities and Cities – is a clear recognition of those on the frontline of humanity's battle against COVID-19. Let me acknowledge the City of George Town, Penang, and ThinkCity, the Malaysian urban regeneration agency, for hosting me today. Their work in supporting the Malaysian Government's efforts, to keep COVID-19 under control, is exemplary.

Frontline workers, comprising of those in local government, healthcare and hospital staff, grassroots communities, women's groups, voluntary organizations, neighbourhood watch, and youth groups, are the heroes of our generation. They have been instrumental in keeping neighbourhoods safe, and ensuring vulnerable populations are cared for properly.

Going forward, I call upon policy makers and urban managers to continue engaging and supporting communities systematically. Please include them in urban planning, in the implementation and monitoring of governmental efforts to recover from the on-going impact of COVID-19. From UN-Habitat, we provide our services through our recently launched Catalogue of Services, and also our technical support in 93-countries.

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests,

As many of you know – the World Cities Day marks the end of Urban October – a month of global activities around sustainable urbanization. The month began with the global observance of World Habitat Day, with the main event hosted by Surabaya Indonesia. The theme was Housing For All: For a Better Urban Future.

We also launched the UN-Habitat Campaign - the 40 Days Safer Cities Challenge, which promotes safety in communities. It engaged the partners of the Global Network for Safer Cities

with 37 organisations joining the challenge. The Campaign involved more than 30 events – festivals, lectures, webinars, expert groups meetings – engaging more than 3,000 people.

I am grateful to Member States, city and community leaders for your support for this Urban October. In total, we had over 570 events across five continents, involving 64 countries and 195 cities. There are 69 events ongoing today, in Nakuru, Nairobi, Cairo, New York, Penang, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Bangkok, Nepal, Fiji, Myanmar and many other locations. At each of these events, our partners have made a commitment to support sustainable urbanisation efforts, and no contribution is too small. I am also hoping that more cities will join the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) process, and UN-Habitat has a dedicated team, to help cities interested in carrying out the Voluntary Local Reviews.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

This year's World Cities Day is all about staying connected, and widening opportunities, to ensure that human settlements come together, in support of national and global recovery. At our recently concluded UN-Habitat Executive Board meeting, Member States reaffirmed their support for multilateral action. If we are to recover, let us build back better and greener. We can only do this if we work together.

Let us double our efforts, and fulfil our commitments made during this Urban October, to ensure we work together in an integrated manner during this Decade of Action. We have less than ten years to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. COVID-19 may have pushed us back, but it is also an opportunity to rethink, reflect, reskill and rebuild a better world for all.

Thank you / Xiexie / Shukraan / Merci / Spasiba / Gracias / Asante Sana!