

**Statement by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Partner and Pledge for Sustainable Urbanization
2 December 2020**

Honourable Martha Delgado, President of the UN-Habitat Assembly

Your Excellency, Mr Jafar Barmaki, Chair of the Executive Board

Excellencies, distinguished participants,

Friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your support and participation in today's "Partner and Pledge for Sustainable Urbanization" with UN-Habitat. Let me also thank the Member States for the approval of UN-Habitat's 2021 Work Programme and Budget in October this year.

The UN-Habitat Work Programme reflects significant contributions to accelerate the recovery of cities and communities during the COVID pandemic, as well as accelerate action towards the SDGs globally. It also reflects the support to Member States to address the many challenges faced by cities and communities through integrated planning, improved governance and the provision of housing for all.

The Covid-19 pandemic throws the light on the crucial role of cities and communities, to recover from the socio-economic challenges posed by the pandemic. Governments around the world realise that we need healthy, safe, resilient and inclusive sustainable development. It also shone a bright light on the inequalities in cities, that we must all double our efforts to tackle in 2021.

Our goal is simple but ambitious: to make sure that cities have the right footprint to limit and manage the impact of climate change, to protect the poor and vulnerable from the worst consequences of crisis and disasters, and to create access to adequate housing for the more than 1 billion people who live in slums or are homeless.

As urbanisation intensifies, we want to help countries to provide clean water to 1.2 billion more people, and safe sanitation to 2.5 billion, who will lack access to these basic services. Solutions to the challenges facing the global community start in cities, and our pledge is to tackle these challenges together with you.

I appreciate the support of Member States and other development partners, for the 2020 UN-Habitat Programme of Work. As of 31 October, a total of USD 137.5 million had been mobilised in new funding for earmarked programmes. However, core contributions stood at only USD 4.1 million against a budget of 18.9 million.

This is why I am pleased to convene this session today, to seek your commitments to both partner with us and to pledge your support to this vision for a better urban world for all.

I am committed to be a strong steward of all resources that are provided to this organisation. As you know, we are continuing the austerity measures to address the financial shortfall in UN-Habitat's core budget. We also launched a new resource mobilisation strategy this year, to support implementation of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. This strategy was adopted by Member States last month and sets an ambitious plan for 2021 and beyond.

We are engaged in three major streams of work to increase flexible and predictable funding for both core and earmarked activities. This includes strengthening strategic partnership with Member States, diversifying our donor base, and leveraging resources through multi-donor funds.

I have had strategic funding dialogues with all of the Regional groups since August, and I commit to continuing these meetings on a regular basis. I have also had a series of bilateral meetings with several Member States to strengthen existing relations, develop new partnerships, and reach out to former supporters of UN-Habitat's work. We have held an annual joint donor consultations in November, led by Norway and Sweden. We are working to improve our communications with Member States as well, providing monthly updates on income and sharing the Urban Impact newsletter highlighting our results and impact.

In addition, we have also taken steps to diversify our donor base, such as our early discussions to develop a UN-Habitat Endowment Fund, engage systematically with the private sector, and structure our outreach through a Foundations and Philanthropy Platform, which will look at entrepreneurship and innovative urban financing.

We have worked within the UN system to leverage funding through multi-donor funds, such as the Multi-Purpose Trust Fund for the Global UN COVID-19 response, and in our country programmes

working with other UN agencies under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. We have renewed our participation in the Adaptation Fund and other similar mechanisms.

As we close this year, we are already putting in place plans for 2021 activities, accelerating our work in this Decade of Action and joining with others to strengthen cities as the engines for sustainable development. But we cannot do this alone. We need your support to bring this collective vision to life.

We believe solutions start in cities and it is critical to work with all partners to bring our work to scale. From securing property titles for Yazidi families in Iraq, to helping Fiji win climate adaptation funds for its villages, core funding is critical to our ability to contribute to the 2030 Agenda.

I know how important this work is first-hand, and how critical our funding is to cities, communities and families. I visited the Cyclone Idai affected areas in Sofala Province, including Beira, Dondo and Nhamatanda District in April 2019. I was very proud to see one of the few standing buildings in Beira City, was a school built by UN-Habitat. But that's not the only school UN-Habitat has built in Mozambique. In more than two decades supporting disaster risk reduction and urban resilience in this country, we have built or restored 400 schools benefiting 50,000 students.

Our work has laid the foundation for strong partnerships and trust, and we are even now negotiating a resilient housing reconstruction project which will benefit 15,000 households by 2024. From that programmatic base, we were able to scale up our engagement quickly—through unearmarked funds—to respond to COVID-19 response and support 250,000 people in prevention and recovery. From that small investment, we have leveraged new funding and a broader scope of work, with our partner UNICEF, to continue supporting cities to recover from the pandemic.

In Lebanon, our country programme had to prove its adaptability in order to continue to support vulnerable Lebanese and refugee communities, as they coped with multiple crises. We supported families in the midst of a deteriorating socio-economic crisis, against a background of a collapsed banking system. We continued to step up, innovate and meet the unfolding urban crisis needs, taking on the additional challenges of COVID-19 with a small amount of seed funding from our unearmarked funds, to meet water and sanitation needs for some of the most vulnerable urban communities – people who are often overlooked in a context where limited data or understanding of the urban complexities exist.

And then again, in August, UN-Habitat's urban crisis expertise proved absolutely critical, in immediately responding to the devastating explosions rocking Beirut's Port.

We supported local authorities in applying normative expertise in mapping, urban analysis and damage assessment techniques to buildings, houses and schools – combined with a tangible on-the-ground operational response which provided immediate housing support and infrastructure health. We worked with the UN Country Team, UN-Habitat Country Team, the EU, World Bank, and donors to ensure that urban complexities, such as housing, land and property rights are addressed immediately and longer-term.

Project-based funding fuels this work in Lebanon, but also constrains the ability to respond when it matters most. Unearmarked core funding, would enable us to support a programme such as Lebanon to scale up and be agile, enhance its specialised impact where it matters most, and take this experience to scale with global normative work. This is what can change people's lives and the cities in which they live. Core funding will also enable us to strengthen our global presence in key multi-lateral centres, to strengthen partnerships and build even greater collaboration to leverage sustainable urban development around the world.

Please, join hands with us as partners in this work. During this session, I invite you to announce commitments for 2021, particularly for core activities, so that as we embark on our important work next year, we have a realistic understanding of the resources and can be good stewards of those resources to drive impact.

We hope that by the end of this session, we will have gone a long way in securing the USD 10 million for the core budget and the USD 205.9 million required for earmarked global and country programmes.

Thank you for joining us here today, for joining us in this vision of to build back better, greener and fairer, to ensure no one and no place is left behind in our urbanising world.