

UN-Habitat Executive Board Meeting

7& 8 April 2021

Executive Director's Opening Speech

- Mr Chairman
- Members of the UN-Habitat Executive Board
- Your Excellencies
- Colleagues of the United Nations
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning, Good afternoon and Good evening to all of you!

1. **As we come together, a year after the global pandemic started affecting our lives and our work around the world, I am pleased that we have found effective ways to continue our collective efforts in support of people, communities, cities and countries by COVID-19.**
2. Let me thank **Her Excellency Madame Zainab Bangura**, the Director-General of UNON and her team for facilitating our meeting.
3. Let me also take the opportunity to thank **His Excellency Mr. Charles Hinga Mwaura**, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Housing, for your presence here today. A special thanks to the Government of Kenya for including the United Nations family in the vaccination programme. On behalf of UN-Habitat, we are truly grateful.

4. My appreciation to **Her Excellency Madame Marta Peralta Delgado**, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry of Mexico and the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly, for her continued efforts to raise the profile of our mandate and for Mexico's support in resource mobilization, especially non-earmarked funding.

Your Excellencies

5. I continue to be impressed by the resilience of **front-line workers everywhere and our headquarters staff who have worked tirelessly to support them**. I am glad to report that the UN-Habitat team with the support of Member States have successfully responded to COVID-19 in 37 countries and some 300 cities, reaching more than 10 million people in these programmes. A special acknowledgement to our donors for making it possible for us to continue to deliver on the UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan by providing \$32 million in support of 75 projects.
6. Working in-house, the UN-Habitat team did a deep dive into how the pandemic has affected our concepts of sustainable urbanization. This resulted in the *Cities & Pandemics Report: Towards a more just, green and healthy future* launched just last week.
7. For 2021, I have identified **three broad priorities** that are aligned with the Strategic Plan that will be the focus of the Programme this year. first, adequate & affordable housing as the basis for sustainable neighbourhoods and cities; second, climate resilience and adaptation to respond to the climate crisis; and third, localising the SDGs as a way to translate policy into practice. These thematic areas will form the basis for pooled and thematic funding, bringing UN-Habitat into alignment with the wider UN funding compact.

8. We welcome the **oversight role of the Executive Board** as we deepen the reforms at the Programme. We have now closed almost 90% of all open grants since 2015. We have met more than 85% of all OIOS and independent evaluation recommendations. We have established Standard Operating Procedures in our management processes as recommended by the Ernest & Young audit (2019).
9. Excellencies, as you will hear today, we remain constrained in our work due to our **financial position**. We are a multilateral organization, yet are increasingly dependent on bilateral donor project funds. Despite a difficult financial environment globally, we managed to secure USD 202 million in resources but only 5% of that is un-earmarked contributions. The foundation trust fund is in deficit.
10. This **constrains my ability to direct resources and actions** to those places where [the](#) need is greatest. It limits our ability to work globally, and the Field Architecture Policy is constrained. We cannot realize the new organization structure you approved in 2019. Several areas of the strategic plan are deeply underfunded in this first year of implementation. Our global impact and adherence to the Strategic Plan as approved by this Executive Board cannot be carried out. During this meeting, I will be seeking your indication of how we will address these constraints together as we prepare for the High-Level Meeting in New York next year. We are in this together and I am confident that UN-Habitat and Member States can find the solutions to ensure we deliver our mandate and promise of better cities and communities.

Thank you.

(674 words; 5 minutes)