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**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the  
United Nations Human Settlements Programme  
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High-level midterm review  
Nairobi, 29 June–1 July 2021  
Item 6 of the provisional agenda\***  
**Preparations for the eleventh session of the  
World Urban Forum**

## **Preparations for the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum**

### **Report of the Executive Director**

#### **Introduction**

1. One of the key roles of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is to mobilize broader action regarding sustainable urbanization at all levels and by all stakeholders. Since its establishment in 2001, the World Urban Forum (WUF) has become the primary advocacy platform for urban transformation, bringing together leading urban actors to address the most pressing issues relating to rapid urbanization and its impact on cities, communities, economies and the environment. WUF allows UN-Habitat to strengthen its global mandate, achieve expected results and leverage action towards implementation of the strategic plan. The tenth session of WUF, held in Abu Dhabi in 2020, established a call to action and a commitment from all partners to implement the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals during the decade of action for their achievement. In the intersessional period of 2020–2021, UN-Habitat has continued to advocate for those commitments and track the progress of the “Abu Dhabi Declared Actions” set out in the outcome document of the tenth session.<sup>1</sup> The eleventh session of WUF (WUF11) will be held in Katowice, Poland, in 2022. In preparation, UN-Habitat is making efforts to ensure that the declared actions are being implemented and the voices of its partners in sustainable urban development are being heard.

#### **I. World Urban Forum**

2. The World Urban Forum was established pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 18/5 of 16 February 2001 of the Commission on Human Settlements and has progressively strengthened its authority as a key coordination, advocacy, partnership and knowledge platform on sustainable urbanization.

3. WUF has four main objectives: (a) to improve collective knowledge about sustainable urbanization through inclusive open debates and the exchange of best practices and policies; (b) to raise awareness of sustainable urbanization among stakeholders and constituencies, including the general public; (c) to increase coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system and with various stakeholders and constituencies for the effective implementation of the New Urban

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\* HSP/OECPR.2021/1.

<sup>1</sup> WUF10\_final\_declared\_actions.pdf (unhabitat.org).

Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals; and (d) to provide substantive and strategic inputs from multilateral organizations, national and subnational governments, and other stakeholders to reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

4. WUF brings together leading urban actors to address the most pressing issues around rapid urbanization and its impact on cities, communities, economies and the environment. Participants include, among others, international organizations; national, local and regional governments; civil society; grassroots communities; women, youth and other disadvantaged groups; the private sector; and academia.

5. Over 10 sessions, WUF has evolved into a unique global forum, where urban actors meet, showcase innovative urban solutions and influence policy and action in the communities they serve. For UN-Habitat, it has become the key platform for advocating for, and monitoring the implementation of, the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **II. Preparations for the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum**

6. In preparation for WUF11, UN-Habitat and the host country are finalizing negotiations on the host country agreement and the agreement concerning arrangements and logistics. The Office of Legal Affairs oversees the process and ensures alignment with United Nations regulations and rules. The host country is represented in the negotiations by a multidisciplinary team consisting of representatives of the host city, the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as several focal points for programming and substantive matters.

7. The host country has established an organizing committee for WUF11, which includes representatives from relevant institutions and other stakeholder groups. The committee has a programming subteam that reviews the plans for the event, focusing on its theme and legacy initiatives.

8. In choosing a theme for WUF11, UN-Habitat mapped broad urban development issues, trends and priorities and considered their relevance in terms of global urban development agendas and United Nations system priorities as well as how they contribute to the programme's mandate, align with the host country's priorities and address known knowledge gaps.

9. The theme chosen by UN-Habitat and the host country, "Future of cities", aligns with the United Nations Secretary-General's task force on the future of cities and the goal of strengthening the institutional relationship between the United Nations system and cities.

10. The World Cities Report 2022 will be launched at WUF11. The first expert group meeting to define the report's scope and outline as well the WUF11 concept paper is planned for May 2021.

11. WUF is committed to incubating scalable initiatives in the pursuit of sustainable urbanization at the global level. To demonstrate that commitment, various legacy initiatives, such as the WUF Alumni Network and the Cities Investment Platform, were launched at the tenth session of the forum (WUF10) in Abu Dhabi in February 2020. UN-Habitat has continuously worked with its partners to implement those projects during the intersessional period and will report on their progress at WUF11.

12. UN-Habitat is currently discussing the legacy initiatives of WUF11 with the Government of Poland and the city of Katowice. The Government of Poland is committed to using WUF11 and its momentum to maximize the implementation of its national urban policy.

13. The host country's focus on cities aligns with the work by UN-Habitat on the voluntary local reviews; these are being undertaken by a growing number of cities as a complement to the voluntary national reviews, which communicate how key stakeholders are implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level. UN-Habitat will continue to work with its partners to support the voluntary local reviews and will use WUF11 as a platform to promote, mobilize and present successful practices by cities.

14. Regional and national urban forums are used to prepare for WUF. Representatives from regions and countries meet at those events to monitor the implementation of national and global agendas and mobilize stakeholders towards sustainable urban development. WUF11 will devote a section of its programme to promoting exchange between national urban forum hosts and assessing priorities for the next two-year cycle. The workplan for the national urban forums for 2021–2023 is finalized, and UN-Habitat has reached out to regional and country offices. The aim is to support the organization of 35 national urban forums to be held in preparation for WUF11, with a focus on the least developed countries.

15. WUF11 was promoted in key global and regional events in the second half of 2020, and this will continue in 2021. Several meetings have been held with host country representatives to develop the communications strategy and define national, regional and global responsibilities regarding press coverage and media training. A new logo and website, expected by May 2021, will strengthen the WUF identity and promote WUF11 activities.

16. On several occasions, including at the global observance of World Habitat Day on 5 October 2020 in Surabaya, Indonesia, Ms. Małgorzata Jarosińska-Jedynak, secretary of state at Poland's Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, has highlighted WUF11 and invited partners and stakeholders to join the preparatory process. UN-Habitat has participated in several events related to sustainable urban development that have been organized by the host country.

17. The WUF11 programme will depend on the status of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Despite travel restrictions during the intersessional period, online discussions have been held regarding meeting rooms, offices, the exhibition space, registration and accommodation locations as well as media requirements and technical services, including sign language, real-time captioning and live streaming, among others. UN-Habitat, the host country and the host city are committed to ensuring that WUF11 is inclusive and accessible to everyone.

### III. Contribution to the decade of action

18. At WUF10, urban actors committed themselves to supporting the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals during the decade of action. They did so with a set of voluntary actions known as the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions. These have become even more important as the world begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and cities and communities embark on “building back better”.

19. At the midpoint of the WUF intersessional period, UN-Habitat invited its partners to share their progress on the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions via the Urban Agenda Platform. This online knowledge portal was developed by UN-Habitat for global, regional, national and local partners to share reports, best practices and data on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

20. The Abu Dhabi Declared Actions support the objectives of 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on Goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development). As of March 2021, all declared actions were populated with updates from 20 contributions, representing collaboration and cooperation among 40 global partners.

21. Actions by, among others, international organizations; national, local and regional governments; civil societies; grassroots communities; women, youth and other disadvantaged groups; the private sector; and academia are taking place globally and in a targeted way in four regions: Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa. Some examples include the following:

(a) In early 2021, Fiji's Prime Minister, Mr. Frank Bainimarama, reaffirmed the commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, indicating this would soon be legislated through a ground-breaking climate change bill.

(b) Through the Making Cities Resilient 2030 website, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and its partners are helping local governments achieve risk-informed development at the local level by implementing sound and inclusive strategies for disaster risk reduction.

(c) The World Blind Union and UN-Habitat are promoting the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities through a 2020–2023 agreement to mainstream disability inclusion, universal design and accessibility.

(d) The United Nations Development Programme and its partners are working on an array of projects in all four regions. These include developing urban planning in line with environmental sustainability indicators, strengthening municipal capacities for the provision of services and improving the livelihoods of the urban poor. Other projects aim to reduce emissions and integrate low-carbon development and foster greater coherence of disaster risk reduction for refugees and other vulnerable populations.

(e) United Cities and Local Governments launched the “Seven Keys” programme in 2020 to promote the cultural dimension in the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals. It adopted a decalogue for the aftermath of COVID-19, which aims to put new citizenship and freedoms for renewed democracy at the centre of the agenda, reduce the digital divide and build the next generation of rights and equality.

(f) In 2020, the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative, in collaboration with the Rwandan Ministry of Infrastructure, the Rwandan Ministry of Local Government and The Prince’s Foundation, hosted an online programme on sustainable urbanization in the Commonwealth. It featured 11 events, involving 106 panellists from 31 countries, and attracted more than 2000 participants from 44 Commonwealth and 44 non-Commonwealth countries, amounting to more than 4000 unique views.

22. In the run-up to WUF11, UN-Habitat will continue to encourage its partners to report on progress on the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions, so they can celebrate successes, share lessons learned and continue to build a community of practices that support sustainable urban development. Partners are also urged to use national urban forums as a vehicle for mobilizing action, generating new declared actions and reporting on these commitments. At WUF11, partners will have an opportunity to show how they are fulfilling their pledges to ensure cities are more inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

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