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

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Report of the Executive Director

I. 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 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. The Forum allows UN-Habitat to strengthen its global mandate, achieve expected results and leverage action towards implementation of the New Urban Agenda. It is also recognized in the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 as a key vehicle for strengthening collaboration and partnerships with diverse stakeholders.

2. The eleventh session of the World Urban Forum will be held in Katowice, Poland, from 26 to 30 June 2022. In preparation, UN-Habitat has worked with Member States, local government and stakeholders to ensure wide consultation on the concept note, programme and declared actions of the Forum. UN-Habitat will also continue to advocate for the commitments that comprise the declared actions and will track the progress of the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions, set out in the outcome document of the tenth session of the World Urban Forum, held in Abu Dhabi in 2020.¹

II. World Urban Forum

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

4. The World Urban Forum has four main objectives:

(a) To improve collective knowledge on sustainable urban development through inclusive open debates, sharing of lessons learned and the exchange of best practices and good policies;

* HSP/EB.2022/1.

¹ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/09/hsp-eb-2020-inf_7- wuf10_report_september_2020.pdf.

(b) To raise awareness on sustainable urbanization among stakeholders and constituencies, including the general public;

(c) To increase coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system and with stakeholders and constituencies for the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(d) To provide substantive and strategic inputs from multilateral organizations, subnational and national governments and other stakeholders for reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

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

6. Over 10 sessions since 2002, the World Urban Forum has evolved into a unique global forum for urban actors to 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 advocacy and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

III. Preparations for the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum

7. In preparation for the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, UN-Habitat and the Government of Poland have finalized the host country agreement and all other logistical arrangements. The agreement, which was completed with the support of the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, was signed on 24 November 2021. On 21 December 2021, the official logo for the Forum was launched at a press conference organized by the Government of Poland, UN-Habitat and the city of Katowice, and at the same time, the registration process and website of the Forum became operational.

8. The theme of the eleventh session is “Transforming our Cities for a Better Urban Future”, providing a platform for Member States, local government, urban innovators and stakeholders to raise awareness and promote sustainable urbanization solutions. The theme is directly related to the Secretary-General’s call to “build back better, greener and fairer”. At the eleventh session, the “One United Nations” meeting will highlight the report of the Secretary-General, entitled “Our Common Agenda”, which recalls global commitments. The forum seeks to strengthen relationships and create linkages to accelerate the implementation of global urban commitments. It reiterates global commitments to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 by making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

9. The session will also follow up on actions arising from the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the review of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, to be held in New York on 28 April 2022, convened by the President of the General Assembly. The Katowice declared actions are expected to build on the commitments made at the high-level meeting and highlight the action plans for strengthening the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

10. From 8 to 10 June 2021, UN-Habitat organized expert group meetings to select topics for the six dialogue sessions of the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum. The topics of equitable urban futures, greener urban futures, innovation and technology, future urban economy and finance, urban planning and governance, and building urban resilience were selected, based on the key findings of the World Cities Report 2021.

11. Subsequently, the background paper for the eleventh session was developed. At the expert group meetings, UN-Habitat mapped broad urban development issues, trends and priorities, taking into consideration their relevance to the global urban development agenda and United Nations system priorities. As a marketplace for ideas, the World Urban Forum will contribute to UN-Habitat’s mandate, align with the vision and priorities of the host country in relation to the Forum and address known knowledge gaps.

12. To ensure that the World Urban Forum remains inclusive and consultative, the first draft of the background paper was shared with Member States, external partners and the task force for the eleventh session. More than 8,000 partners were consulted. At the eleventh session, urban actors are expected to commit to supporting the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals during the decade of action. Voluntary committed actions have

become even more important as the world begins to recover from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and cities and communities embark on “building back better” programmes.

13. The eleventh session is also an opportunity for UN-Habitat to highlight the progress made by Member States in implementing the New Urban Agenda. That includes the work on voluntary local reviews and national urban forums and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level. UN-Habitat will continue to work with its partners to support voluntary local reviews and will use the “Voices from the City” platform at the eleventh session to promote and present successful local government practices.

14. Regional and national urban forums continue to lead the way towards the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum. To date, the following countries and subregions have held national urban forums since 2020: Cabo Verde, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guinea-Bissau, Israel, Malaysia, Peru, Poland and Spain at the national level; and the Caribbean, the Marmara Sea area, and South-East Asia at the subregional level. At the regional level, ministerial meetings on the New Urban Agenda were held in Cartagena, Colombia, on 22 and 23 November 2021 by the General Assembly of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America, and the fourth Arab Ministerial Forum for Housing and Urban Development was held in Amman from 14 to 16 December 2021. A virtual regional forum will be held in the Asia-Pacific region from 28 to 31 March 2022 and the ninth Africities Summit will be held from 17 to 21 May 2022 in Kisumu, Kenya.

15. In the run-up to the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, UN-Habitat will continue to encourage its partners to report on progress on the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions through the Urban Agenda Platform as a way to celebrate successes, share lessons learned and continue to build a community of practice that supports 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 commitments. At the World Urban Forum, partners will have an opportunity to show the ways in which they are fulfilling their pledges to ensure that cities are more inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

16. UN-Habitat has also started working with the host city to realize the legacy initiatives of the eleventh session. The Government of Poland has undertaken to develop an “Action Plan for Cities” as a major national commitment towards sustainable urban development and is also committed to activating 11 thematic zones within the city of Katowice as a demonstration of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda at the local level. Other legacy initiatives include the World Urban Forum Alumni Network and the Cities Investment Facility, both of which were launched at the tenth session of the World Urban Forum, in Abu Dhabi.

17. The programme and the participation modality for the eleventh session will depend on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic. A technical team from UN-Habitat visited Katowice in November 2021 to plan a robust and inclusive hosting facility in anticipation of continued travel restrictions and health measures arising from the pandemic. This will be the first hybrid World Urban Forum, featuring physical and online discussions in specially equipped meeting rooms and offices, and interactive exhibition spaces. The Government of Poland is ensuring that all requirements are met through its multimedia and technical services, including sign language, real-time captioning and live streaming. UN-Habitat, the host country and the host city are all committed to ensuring that the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum is inclusive, accessible and digitally available to everyone.
