

## Speech of the UN-Habitat Executive Director at the City Expo Malaysia Soft Launch

**Date: 25 August 2021**

It gives me immense pleasure to be among dear friends, many of whom I have enjoyed exchanges in the past with spirited rhetoric and invigorated discussions about the future of Malaysia. The esteemed profession of planning, helps us to chart a course for our cities in the delicate balance between functional efficiency and social equity. In this regard, few entities have done more, to continuously advance collective knowledge, shared experience and cooperation on urban planning in Malaysia, than the Malaysian Institute of Planners.

I would like to congratulate Datin Tpr Hajah Noraida Saludin, on your recent appointment as President of MIP, and we look forward to opportunities to collaborate to move our cities forward.

Congratulations also to MIP and Nextdor Property Communications, for organising the inaugural City Expo Malaysia, a virtual event on city planning and development that invites city stakeholders, from Malaysia and around the world, to engage and share ideas and solutions, to overcome challenges facing our cities. Held in conjunction with World Town Planning Day on 8 November 2021, City Expo Malaysia also marks the celebrations of 100 years of formal town planning in Malaysia.

I wish to express my respect and gratitude to the distinguished Chairman and immediate past president of MIP, Tpr Haji Ihsan Zainal Mokhtar, for warmly welcoming me to officiate your proceedings today, marking the launch of the City Expo Malaysia Star Dialogue Programme 2021, which promotes Conversations with City Leaders and Influencers.

Such efforts led by MIP to cultivate and foster the talents of young Malaysian planners is worthy of praise beyond measure. It is a path which we all must take as planners, and a journey towards recognition as a practitioner, increasingly in demand.

As planners and more broadly the planning community, we strive to help others make sense of their socio-political environments, by offering better, clearer and stronger conceptions of what lies ahead. In turn, our predictive work and recommendations give cause to new and more progressive city policy and legislation. Meanwhile, with each regulation and planning framework passed, our work as planners fuels the persevering quest of cities to achieve an elevated state and better quality of life for all through the generations.

For Malaysia in particular, such skills in your arsenal in areas including strategic foresight, integrated and balanced urban and territorial planning, as well as, technical proficiencies will be essential in navigating the effective development and implementation of the 12th Malaysia Plan, and Roadmap of Malaysia towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Today, Malaysia is one of the most urbanized countries in Asia, experiencing significant cumulative growth in the last two decades, transforming the country from 34 percent urban in 1980, with estimates of growing to 80 percent by 2030. With recognized challenges being associated with this rapid urbanization, including the urban-rural divide, increased urban sprawl and urban poor's lack of affordable and adequate housing, as well as, green and open spaces, poor urban mobility and connectivity, traffic congestion and other social ills.

However, by analysing and assessing all plausible scenarios that are imaginative yet realistic for Malaysia, and striving towards a common national vision, shared values and aspirations, we can ensure that well-planned and well-managed cities can be the source of solutions to, rather than the cause of, economic, social and environmental challenges. This is why UN-Habitat is joining hands with the City Expo Malaysia to promote a more just, green and healthy future for all.

Evidently, Malaysia's urbanization has been a product and driver of the nation's impressive economic development, increasing GDP per capita from less than USD \$1,000 in the mid-1970s, to USD \$11,000 in 2018.

It is my sincere hope that all of you participating in this launch today, to relish in debate and inquiry, helping to envision a strong, progressive and prosperous Malaysia. This will require a renewed sense of determination, to overcome challenges ahead in tackling urbanization in Malaysia.

I look forward to partaking in and hearing from others in the series. On behalf of UN-Habitat and myself personally, we remain committed to supporting MIP and all of your endeavours towards a brilliant future for Malaysia in the years to come!

It is our hope that CEM 2021 will be able to promote more sustainable urban planning in Malaysia, and forge strategic partnerships towards achieving the SDGs and New Urban Agenda.

In closing, let's take the opportunity, as we rebuild and recover from the dual challenges of Climate Change and the pandemic, to share not only experience but also creative and innovative ideas, which are needed for tackling the unprecedented challenges.

Now, please allow me to officially announce the soft launch of City Expo Malaysia 2021!

Thank you!