

Speech of the UN-Habitat Executive Director at the World Urban Campaign Annual Assembly Meeting

Date: 13 October 2021

I am delighted to have the opportunity to welcome you to this annual assembly meeting of the World Urban Campaign, and to share with you my thoughts and vision on advocacy in a world that is rapidly changing and calls for continuous adaptation.

First, I would like to congratulate you for the achievements and success of the World Urban Campaign in the past two years. A lot of progress has been made to make the campaign fit for purpose to better support UN-Habitat's mandate and mission and the delivery of our work programme.

Secondly, I would like to thank the WUC Steering Committee for their hard work and dedication.

I would like to thank the two Steering Committee Co-Chairs, Sri Husnaini Sofjan and Sandeep Chachra for their leadership and vision which made everything possible.

I would like to also thank Bert Smolders who has also played a crucial role as Co-Chair up to July this year and is now an Honorary member of the WUC.

It is my honor to give special thanks to the thirteen elected Partners Constituent Groups Chairs as well as my colleagues from the WUC Secretariat for their support and active participation in this process.

Finally, my sincere gratitude to all members, partners, sponsors and individual City Changers for your active engagement. The World Urban Campaign is a collective intelligence of 180 organisations driven by all of you to support advocacy on the New Urban Agenda, the urban dimension of the SDGs under the Decade of Action and UN-Habitat Strategic Plan.

I would like to reiterate that the essence of the World Urban Campaign is to engage the public, civil society, the business sector, professionals, and the research community at large to work with national and local governments to achieve the sustainability agenda. It is a global movement that promotes and elevates the urban agenda through a positive vision and understanding of the tremendous benefits cities can bring to urban dwellers and future generations.

As a global platform, the World Urban Campaign is a key instrument for UN-Habitat.

Your Vision: 'Together shaping the future of cities leaving no one behind' is directly

addressing UN-Habitat’s mandate.

Your Mission: ‘To contribute to develop solutions and take action in cities and communities in implementing the New Urban Agenda to accelerate the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030,’ is clearly anchored in UN-Habitat’s mission.

I would like to express my appreciation for the World Urban Campaign as it is thriving on partnerships to deliver on actions in a spirit of collaboration and mutual support amongst the diverse community of partners. Complementing each other rather than competing helps build synergies which is vital in order to catalyze actions that will accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.

Urban Thinkers Campuses (UTC) are the key platforms to do so. You have tirelessly organized UTCs since 2014 to convene thousands of participants to exchange thoughts on urban issues, promote solutions and allow people around the world to realize the importance of sustainable urbanization. Many thanks to all of you!

In 2021, you have focused on climate action. You have come together to support UN-Habitat’s action campaign ‘Climate Action 4 Cities’ and you have called to action with us to raise ambitions on mitigation and adaptation. This is highly commendable. It has been an exciting journey that will end after COP26; a key moment for all of us to hopefully see more commitments to address climate change. We hope that a strong collaboration in the implementation of more local action campaigns can be achieved in the near future.

In 2022, I would like you to focus on our urban future; more precisely ‘Transforming our Cities for a Better Urban Future.’ This will be the theme of the 11th session of the World Urban Forum set to be held in Katowice next year.

As we all know, the world is at a crossroads. Cities are struggling with multiple crisis amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the multiple effects of climate change. The coronavirus pandemic is a stark reminder that urban areas need to be prepared for a dynamic and unpredictable future. Vulnerable groups are hit by social, economic, and political challenges, resulting in devastating setbacks to advance inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. This raises some key questions about the future of cities. What kind of cities are needed to support the future of humanity? How do we envisage and reimagine the future of cities? What do we want our cities to look like?

With these questions in mind, I would like you to engage multiple audiences to campaign for a better urban future. The World Urban Campaign should ask people how they can drive change to support sustainable and inclusive, recovery and long-term resilience. The campaign should promote city changers that have made an impact on their communities and provided solutions for cities to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals.

They can be civil society and grassroots organizations that propose solutions and engage in dialogues with decision-makers to address urban issues. They can be private sector companies that explore innovative and affordable solutions and business models to improve urban quality of life in partnership with the other stakeholders. They can be urban practitioners: architects, planners, social workers who revisit urban planning, design, building and management models in partnership with key stakeholders. Finally, you need to reach out to the general public to raise awareness on the future of cities and spread new ideas and solutions that have the potential to drive positive change.

Though this is a major task, together as the World Urban Campaign we can steer the debate around the theme to supercharge ideas to solutions.

Please rest assured of UN-Habitat's commitment to the World Urban Campaign in support of the Strategic Plan. We are also counting on your active engagement to help us deliver the urban dimensions of the Decade of Action.

Thank you!