

Message from UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif

Opening Session Urban Thinkers Campus North American Women & SDGs 7 March 2022

Firstly, please allow me to reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the return to normalcy in the territory of Ukraine. Civilians always pay the highest price. To the mayors and community leaders on the frontline, my admiration for your courage and leadership during this difficult time.

I would like to start by thanking the Urban Economy Forum and the Canadian Association of Planners, for co-hosting this Urban Thinkers Campus, in honour of International Women's Day.

Every year on 8 March, we commemorate women's contributions to the world's economy, culture, and politics.

This year International Women's Day theme is: **Changing Climates: Equality today for a sustainable tomorrow** – a theme that recognises the contribution of women and girls around the world to achieve gender equality and build a sustainable future. Our dream is to live in a world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. We all need to strive for a society in which people's differences are recognized and valued, gender biases broken down, and where there is equality for all.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is not only one of the 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is critical to the achievement of all SDGs. Friends, we also must not forget that cities play a critical role in promoting gender equality and equity, as well as empowering women and girls to be active members of society. Well-planned and managed cities can be catalysts for inclusion, and powerhouses of equitable economic growth.

In addition, gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be attained in unsafe cities; while inclusive and safe cities cannot be realised without gender equality and women's empowerment.

It is a known fact that when women and girls are given equal opportunities to succeed, whether educational or leadership, they can be powerful change agents, improving the quality of life for their families and communities.

In 2021, UN-Habitat launched Her City Tool Box, providing normative guidance to Member States and city managers, to ensure women and girls participate in the design and development of their living environment. We need women to help us deliver the city we need now!

Finally, let us recognise the resilience, strength, and determination of women and girls in our cities, communities, and around the world as we celebrate International Women's Day.

Please join me in recognising gender equality and women's empowerment toward the City We Need Now!

Together, we can make sure that no one, no place, and *no woman or girl* is left behind.