

Closing Speech at the Second Session of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat

Date: 23 November 2022

Excellency Chair,

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Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, Excellency Chair, let me thank you for your astute chairing of this second session of the Executive Board meeting of 2022. I am sure I speak for all of us at the Secretariat about how much we value your leadership and guidance. You have given us an opportunity to highlight the added value of UN-Habitat's work.

We have been very fortunate to have with us community leaders, civil society partners, academics, mayors, ministers, and their royal highnesses the Crown Prince of Norway and Crown Princess of Sweden. In a unique way, they represent the range of people we serve as well as the range of partners who enables us to bring positive impact to the ground.

Excellency Chair

Thank you for your recommendation that we include testimonies from our donors, implementation partners and the community that support our initiative. For UN-Habitat to meet our full potential, it is not just funds that we need but the active participation from the communities that we work with to scale up sustainable urban solutions. At the local level, this includes city managers, women leaders, youths, the private sector and professional groups. However, we must plant the seeds of transformative change and water it with passion. I can see the same burning passion to strengthen UN-Habitat in this session of the Executive Board.

Excellencies,

The human condition is the same in all human settlements. Parents want a better future for their children. Youths need jobs to improve their prospects. Mayors need more resources to deliver basic urban services. The private sector needs legal frameworks and good governance to protect their investments. The best way to provide a better urban future is an integrated plan-led approach, informed decision-making based on data and evidence and translating policy into practice.

This is why our appeal to you is to please continue to invest in our normative and operational work.

I am very happy to be able to report that projections of our hard pipeline of projects totals USD 180 million in the coming year. This includes USD 40 million for normative work by our Global Solutions Division while our External Relations, Knowledge & Innovation Division expects USD 18 million to carry out advocacy, communications and campaigns. This leaves USD 122 million for technical support and operational work under the management of the Regional Programme Division.

Yet, no amount of planning or policy making is effective without implementation. We are grateful to co-chair the Secretary-General's Local 2030 Coalition, which will help localise the Sustainable Development Goals. We commit to strengthen our working partnership with the Resident Coordinator system to deliver as One UN.

Let us make sure that policy is translated to practice on the ground. This is the reason why we introduced the concept of declared actions. To date, only 38 countries have submitted their New Urban Agenda Implementation Report. Although some 150 countries have some kind of National Urban Policy, we need the same multi-level support to make sure resources meet the needs on the ground. We need action plans that are accompanied with budget allocations. This is why we have established the City Investment Facility to help Member States and cities do project preparations accompanied by financing packages.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2022 did not begin very auspiciously. We see both the short term and long term effects of man's actions. The warming planet is the result of our unsustainable consumption and development model. Many of us are guilty of wanting this comfortable life; guilty for not doing what we preach; and more importantly, as we envisaged the future of cities, we must work together to put the world back together again.

Climate change resulting in extreme weather does not respect national borders. Sandstorms originating in one region stretches across national borders. Fire and floods impact innocent communities whose carbon footprint does not match with the misery they suffer. The first step towards a better urban future is the realisation that we are all in this together. Once again, I am very pleased to be able to meet the request by Member States that we work with the COP27 Presidency to initiate the first ever Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change. I hope this can be a permanent feature in future COP meetings.

I appeal to Member States and donors to invest as much in adaptation as we are committed to mitigation. Waste pickers, slum dwellers, wage earners; these are our people. The homeless, refugees fleeing from conflicts and climate emergencies; they are our people. The single mother, children growing up without schools, the youth without jobs; they are the reason why in this past year we have had 11 Bureau meetings; 11 meetings of ad hoc working groups on Programme of Work, Budget and Administration; 6 meetings of the working group on Stakeholder Engagement Policy; 1 meeting of the informal contact group on resource mobilisation matters; 1 meeting of the informal contact group on communication matters; and 2 briefings by Executive Director on the status of preparation of the Executive Board.

The numbers for this Executive Board is equally impressive. We have had 85 countries registered, 35 Members of the Executive Board in attendance, a total 342 participants in attendance. We have 7 ministers in attendance, 61 Permanent Representatives, 57 Deputy Permanent Representatives, 177 government officials and 41 partner organisations.

I am grateful to Member States for your spirited engagement, your criticisms, your guidance and your time because it matters that you care about the built environment, the cities and neighbourhoods we call human settlements and for the homes we are trying to protect and nurture. This year, UN-Habitat took part actively at COP27, we were there to commemorate Stockholm +50; we strengthened our cooperation with our sister UN agencies not only because we support the Secretary-General's reforms but because we believe that we cannot ignore the symbiotic relationship between the natural and built environments.

Now, more than ever before, as UNEP celebrates its 50th year and as we embark on our 45th anniversary next year, we all have an opportunity to renew our commitment to leave the planet and our cities a better place than when we found it. 8 billion people now live on planet earth and most of them will live in urban areas.

Finally, let me make one announcement:

I am pleased to announce that we have launched the application process for cities to host World Cities Day and World Habitat Day in 2023 and 2024. You can find all the information to apply on our website unhabitat.org. The theme of the World Habitat Day 2023 is "Resilient Urban Economies: Cities as Drivers of Growth & Recovery"; and the theme for World Cities Day 2023 is "Financing a Sustainable Urban Future for All".

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2022, UN-Habitat's World Cities Report provided us with a glimpse of the future of cities and human settlements. If we do not invest more in planning, basic services and changing the way we consume resources. As we all know, all of us, we were the future once. Let us all aspire to inspire before we expire!

Thank you.