

**Closing remarks of the Executive Director of UN-Habitat at the first session of the Executive Board in Nairobi, Kenya****Date: 29 March 2023**

Excellency Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, Excellency Chair, let me thank you for your excellent chairing of this first session of the Executive Board meeting of 2023. You have given us an opportunity to highlight the added value of UN-Habitat's work.

We have endeavoured to keep the inclusive tradition that you have set for us, by ensuring that we get to hear in video format the communities that have benefited from our work. It is a very good way to convey what we do with the mandate we have from the perspective of the people we serve.

Excellency Chair,

You will be glad to know that this is a very well-attended Executive Board meeting. We have with us in the room as well as connected from their capital over 432 delegates. This included 4 ministers, 7 vice ministers, 61 ambassadors and permanent representatives, 62 deputy permanent representatives, 240 governmental officials and 58 partners and stakeholders.

Excellencies,

In my observation, the spirit of Nairobi - the willingness to listen to each other, to have difficult but constructive dialogue, and the determination to put the people we serve first and foremost, has resulted in a successful Executive Board meeting. This is effective multilateralism in action. I thank all delegations for their support.

As I said earlier, we need to be confident but cautious. The trust that is returning to this organisation is determined by a logical process to arrive at a work plan and a budget, that has wide agreement among all Member States. At the same time, we cannot rest on our achievements. We know we have to continue working hard to ensure we raise the funds we need, to implement the work programme you have approved.

At the same time, I strongly believe that UN-Habitat is much more than a 3 million USD core budget programme. There is a lot more we can do and we must do to help Member States deal with the challenges of rapid urbanisation. I am sure you can see the wide range of our outputs from our earmarked portfolio. We need your help to scale up UN-Habitat to have more impact on ground. By having adequate non-earmarked funds that are necessary if we are going to meet the expectations of Member States, as expressed in the various statements made in these last two days.

I am very happy to note that Member States are keen to work together to complete the good works of the ad-hoc working group on stakeholder engagement policy. Let me record the secretariat's gratitude to Mr Patrick Elgoff, the outgoing Chair for his excellent work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although in 2023 we are starting from a better place, I believe that we must do better in this bumper year from UN-Habitat. I am happy to see the enthusiasm of Member States in the lead-up to the United Nations Habitat Assembly.

I am grateful to the 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 the homes, we are trying to protect and nurture. We will continue to work with you and for you to ensure we have a fruitful United Nations Habitat Assembly.

I welcome the announcement of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, with the confirmation of the venue and date of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum, which will take place in the first week of November 2024. Also, I am thankful for the efforts of the esteemed Government to conclude the signature of the Agreement of Logistical Arrangement.

I am also grateful for all the supportive statements and interventions that recognized the efforts of UN-Habitat in returning to solvency, which was not possible without the unwavering support of our governing bodies.

I welcome the sincere interest and encouragement of the Member States to ensure effective oversight, and I assure you that UN-Habitat is prioritizing addressing and closing all pending recommendations by the oversight bodies related to the organization, namely the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations (OIOS), the United Nations Board of Auditors (BOA), and the independent Joint Investigation Unit (JIU).

In our meeting last November 2023 we had 79 pending BOA recommendations, of which we managed to address and close 29% of them by now. We had 40 pending OIOS recommendations of which we managed to address and close 32% by March 2023. I assure you that UN-Habitat will present a detailed update in our meeting in November 2023, on the overall progress to address the recommendations of the oversight bodies.

Finally, let me make one announcement:

I am pleased to update that the city of Baku in Azerbaijan will be the host of the global observance of World Habitat Day this year, whose theme is “Resilient Urban Economies: Cities as Drivers of Growth & Recovery.”

I am also very happy to announce that the city of Uskudar of Istanbul in Turkiye will be hosting World Cities Day this year, with the theme “Financing a Sustainable Urban Future for All”.

I am also delighted to announce that the city of Santiago de Querétaro in Mexico will be hosting World Habitat Day in 2024.

As we conclude, please allow me to convey my heartfelt thanks to Member States and stakeholders for attending and contributing to this First Session of the Executive Board Meeting of 2023. My appreciation also goes to colleagues at UN-Habitat, UNON and other sister UN agencies for the great preparation and support – you demonstrated by action the spirit of ‘One UN’.

Thank you once again!