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Report on the World Urban Forum

**Report of the tenth and eleventh sessions of the World Urban
Forum****

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The present report summarizes the issues discussed at the tenth and eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, held from 8 to 13 February 2020 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and 26 to 30 June 2022 in Katowice, Poland, respectively. The full reports of these sessions are set out in documents HSP/HA/2/INF.6 and HSP/HA/2/INF.4.
2. The World Urban Forum is the world's premier global conference on urbanization. It was established by the United Nations to examine and advance discussions on the challenges and opportunities presented by rapid urbanization.
3. In its resolution 69/226, the Assembly recognized the Forum as the foremost global arena for interaction among policymakers, local government leaders, non-governmental organizations and expert practitioners in the field of sustainable urban development and human settlements.
4. Overall attendance at the various sessions of the Forum rose from 1,200 at the inaugural session in Nairobi (2002), to the record attendance of over 24,000 from 164 countries in Kuala Lumpur; back to 13,333 participants from 169 countries in Abu Dhabi (2020). Most recently, held during the COVID-19 pandemic and convened for the first time in hybrid mode, the eleventh session in Katowice (2022) brought together over 17,000 participants, with 10,799 in-person and 6,204 virtual participants from 158 countries. It was also the first time the WUF was held in the Eastern European region.
5. Over the last two decades, the Forum has improved its results-oriented approach, identifying focused objectives and measurable indicators of success; designing event formats conducive to achieving relevant outcomes; and strengthening reporting mechanisms to effectively capture and communicate its outcomes.

* HSP/HA.2/1.

** The present document has not been formally edited.

II. Tenth session of the World Urban Forum

A. Overview

6. The tenth session of the Forum, held from 8 to 13 February 2020 in Abu Dhabi, was organized and convened by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat in collaboration with the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the Abu Dhabi Department of Municipalities and Transport, under the theme “Cities of opportunities: connecting culture and innovation”.

7. Abu Dhabi was the first Arab city to host a World Urban Forum and efforts were made to raise the profile of regional urban stakeholders to ensure that the contextual concerns were considered. The voice of Arab urbanism inspired the world with examples of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable human settlements for all, with a strong cultural dimension.

8. WUF10 was guided by the following thematic objectives:

(a) To take stock of emerging innovative approaches and practices in harnessing culture and innovation as drivers of sustainable urbanisation.

(b) To provide greater insights into the linkages between urbanisation, culture, and innovation as a basis for achieving inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements.

(c) To promote synergies between the past and the future, creating spaces for convergence in multicultural and multigenerational communities.

(d) To promote innovative solutions and approaches to urban development, building on the value of cultural diversity to improve quality of life for all in cities and human settlements.

(e) To explore the role of culture and the creative economy in driving prosperity and socioeconomic opportunities for all in cities and human settlements.

(f) To explore the role of culture and innovation in implementing the New Urban Agenda and achieving the urban dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

(g) To build on the lessons learned from previous WUFs, especially with respect to bottom-up approaches to sustainable urbanisation.

B. Participation: a global achievement on the eve of a global pandemic

9. WUF10 set the record for the highest number of participating countries thus far. This confirms the importance of the Forum for international experts as well as stakeholders. There were 13,333 participants from 169 countries, were approximately 80 per cent were from outside the UAE. The Forum took place just a few weeks before the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic.

10. Almost 50 per cent of total participants were from Asia when including those from the United Arab Emirates. Without the 1,854 participants from the UAE, Asia still accounted for nearly 36 per cent of participants. This was followed by Africa (27 per cent), Europe (23 per cent), North America (7 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (4 per cent) and Oceania (2 per cent). Over 39 per cent of participants were women, represented broadly across the various partner types.

11. The session attracted 642 thought leaders, with 52 per cent of main programme speakers being women; moderators from 99 countries; 49 speakers from 25 Least Developed Countries; and the following High-level delegates: one head of state, one head of government, 49 ministers, 64 deputy ministers, close to 100 mayors and numerous vice-mayors and local and regional government officials.

12. A total of 422 United Nations system organisation representatives attended the Forum. These included four Under-Secretary-Generals, five Assistant-Secretary-Generals, and senior officials from the United Nations Secretariat departments and offices. The significant participation of the United Nations System, including agencies, funds, offices, programmes and United Nations Resident Coordinators, provided an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen collective knowledge, coordination and cooperation on sustainable urban development.

C. Programme

13. The Forum offered an impressive range of events, responding to the thematic and specific demands of all types of urban stakeholders. The Forum featured 6 Dialogues, 16 Roundtables, 16 special sessions, and 5 Assemblies, and more than 300 partner-led events, including 159 networking, 79 side events, 30 training events, 57 Voices from Cities events,

17“One United Nations” events, 35 Urban Library events, 29 SDG in Action events, 29 Urban library events, and 130 exhibition booths at the urban expo.

14. The Dialogues were high profile events which played a critical role in driving discussion around ways that culture and innovation can contribute to sustainable urbanisation in different contexts. The six dialogues were titled:

- (a) Urbanisation, Culture and Innovation
- (b) Implementing the New Urban Agenda to Drive Sustainable Change
- (c) Tradition and Modernity: a Creative Convergence for Sustainable Cities
- (d) Frontier Technologies and Innovation for Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Smart Cities
- (e) Urban Planning and Heritage Preservation: Regeneration
- (f) Partnerships and Initiatives Supporting Culture and Innovation in Cities

15. An international exhibition area (Urban Expo) covering 18,000m² hosted 130 exhibits from 51 countries, showcasing technology and best practices to tackle the most pressing urban challenges. The exhibition area included a UN-Habitat corporate exhibition providing a space as the UN focal point for sustainable urbanisation and SDG 11.

16. In keeping with the Forum’s theme, WUF10 was an opportunity to bring participants to the host city. Through 17 technical and site visits, a number of participants got to experience a wide range of Abu Dhabi’s cultural, historical and heritage sites.

D. Outcomes of the tenth session of the World Urban Forum

1. From declarations to the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions

17. For the first time in the World Urban Forum history, at WUF10, partners answered the call to mobilise with a set of voluntary actions and commitments to implement the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Abu Dhabi Declared Actions¹ represent the global effort to achieve the ambitions of SDG11, recognizing that:

- (a) An increasingly urbanised world constitutes a transformative force which can be harnessed and steered for more sustainable development.
- (b) Culture is an integral part of the solution to the challenges of urbanisation and achieving the New Urban Agenda.
- (c) Cities are centres of creativity and innovation as well as places with valuable cultural heritage and identity.
- (d) Cities are incubators of social, economic, environmental, political, and cultural progress.
- (e) Innovation and advances in science and technology are critical for implementing the New Urban Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and other global development frameworks relevant to sustainable urbanisation.

18. To celebrate the Forum’s history and support its ability to have a lasting impact, UN-Habitat launched the WUF Alumni Network at WUF10. The Network brings together previous host cities to promote cross-learning and sharing of best practices. The Alumni Network will work with UN-Habitat to support future host cities on how to best identify, plan, activate and measure the impact of WUF legacy projects and offer practical guidance on organizing a successful WUF.

19. The Urban Agenda platform was also launched at WUF10. The platform has allowed national governments, local and regional governments, as well as all other stakeholders, to access resources from the UN System and to submit national level reports on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, facilitating the sharing of experiences, best practices, and the establishment of alliances for increased action.

¹ https://wuf.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/files/WUF10_final_declared_actions.pdf

2. **A new approach to the financial management of the Forum: the World Urban Forum Legacy Fund**

20. The WUF legacy fund was created during WUF10 as a means by which UN-Habitat could use donor funds to support catalytic initiatives to advance sustainable urbanization. This fund is an initiative of UN-Habitat in collaboration with the host country to demonstrate WUF's role and commitment to incubation of scalable initiatives in pursuit of sustainable urbanization.

3. **Catalytic urban initiatives: National Urban Forums**

21. The 10th session of the World Urban Forum served as a launching pad for catalytic urban initiatives that have the power to drive sustainable urban development and can outlive the 5-day event. They are the basis of what UN-Habitat calls the legacy projects of each Forum and a cornerstone of the Forum's shift from declaration to declared action.

22. The National Urban Forums initiative are an integral part of this strategy, as they present an inclusive, national-level platform that brings multiple stakeholders together, changing the paradigm from policy into practice. The National Urban Forum initiatives will set the scene for targeted engagement and mobilisation in select countries during intersessional periods.

23. The National Urban Forums are also an opportunity to support Member States to review, develop, or initiate the implementation of National Urban Policies. More importantly, they support national and local governments to integrate normative guidance on sustainable urbanization into national development plans, and in turn scale-up the impact by localizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. **The Cities Investment Facility**

24. The Cities Investment Facility was another initiative launched during WUF10, aimed to enable the flow of capital into urban impact projects by supporting the process of ideation, design, and financing through a series of instruments that engage city authorities and investors. During the Forum, city leaders pitched projects to panels of investors who offered feedback on the projects' investment readiness. UN-Habitat, partnering with the Abu Dhabi Global Market and Global Development Incubator, selected a shortlist of projects, and has been developing them further during the intersessional period towards the creation of an investment fair during the next WUF.

E. **Additional information**

25. More information on the tenth session of the tenth session of the World Urban Forum can be found in the following links:

[The Abu Dhabi Declared Actions: One year of implementation.](#)

[The WUF 10 Report.](#)

III. **Eleventh session of the World Urban Forum**

A. **Overview: a Forum session held towards the end of a global pandemic**

26. The eleventh session of the World Urban Forum,² held from 26 to 30 June 2022, marked two decades since the establishment of the Forum by the General Assembly

27. The eleventh session exceeded expectations, especially as the holding of the Forum was only confirmed 3 months before during the UN-Habitat Executive Board's first session of 2022, held in March 2022. The implementation of the Forum at the end of the COVID-19 Pandemic and some months into the Ukraine conflict represented an immense challenge for the host country and city, as well as UN-Habitat. The successful implementation of the Forum is the result of a strong partnership and an efficient collaboration.

28. At the joint opening of the World Urban Forum assemblies, the Executive Director listed five priorities for the eleventh session:

- (a) Partnerships to review the implementation of the New Urban Agenda;
- (b) Quick-impact projects to develop monitoring mechanisms;

² A summary of the meeting can be found at https://enb.iisd.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/wuf11_summary.pdf.

- (c) Approaches for promoting human rights and equity;
- (d) Policies to monitor global commitments; and
- (e) Sustainable urban and land-use planning.

29. The Forum aimed to advance progress towards goals emanating from the various United Nations conferences on sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

30. With strong participation from stakeholders, the Forum continued to demonstrate UN-Habitat's ability to mobilize a wide range of participants representing national, local and regional governments parliamentarians, civil society, older people, women, young people, children, people with disabilities, grass-roots groups, indigenous peoples, local communities, the private sector, foundations and philanthropic organizations, academia, and professionals.

B. Theme of the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum

31. The city of Katowice in Poland hosted the eleventh session of the Forum from 26 to 30 June 2022, under the theme "Transforming our Cities for a Better Urban Future". Katowice was the first city in Central and Eastern Europe to host the Forum.

32. The regional government of Upper Silesia and local governmental partners from Poland played an active role in the Forum to ensure that regional considerations were discussed. Katowice and its region continue to inspire the world with examples of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements for all, with a strong sustainable communities' component of leaving no one and no place behind.

C. Participation: historical benchmarks set for inclusivity, accessibility and gender panel parity

33. The eleventh session of the Forum established a new benchmark for universal access and accessibility. Thanks to the efforts of the host country and UN-Habitat, the venue was 100% accessible for persons with disabilities, which included wheelchair accessibility for persons with physical impairments, as well as features for visual and hearing impairments.

34. There was full interpretation on all main sessions in all six official United Nations languages and Polish, as well as a high number of sessions in Ukrainian. Information was provided in both the international and Polish sign languages, and where not available, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) speech transcription and numerous other mechanisms provided improved access. These efforts demonstrated that transformative action is possible to ensure accessibility for all in any built environment.

35. Overall gender parity was achieved in terms of participation, with 47 per cent of the participants being women and 53 per cent men. Parity among panel members had been achieved at the tenth session of the Forum, and continued at the eleventh session as well, with women representing 52 per cent of the more than 630 speakers at the main sessions.

36. Overall, WUF11 attracted a total of 17,003 participants, with 10,799 participants from 155 countries attending in person. Further, it was also the first hybrid World Urban Forum, with 36% of participants attending virtually.

37. The top countries who attended the WUF11 were Poland, Germany, Malaysia, France, Kenya, Ukraine, Italy, USA, Spain, and India. High-level representation included the Polish Prime Minister, the Prime Minister of Guinea-Bissau, the President of ECOSOC, and the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly. There was also in-person attendance of 20 Ministers and 22 Vice Ministers, and more than 60 Mayors and Governors.

D. Programme

38. In the five days of the Forum, more than 450 high-quality knowledge exchanges took place in the form of assemblies, dialogues, round-table discussions and special sessions. There were also unique stakeholder-led events at the Urban Expo, and UN-Habitat priority programmes were showcased at the UN-Habitat Arena.

39. WUF11's theme "Transformation of cities for a better urban future" was supported by six dialogue spaces, each of which explores a different dimension of the theme:

- (a) Equitable urban futures.
- (b) Building resilience for sustainable urban future.
- (c) Resilient Economies and Sustainable Finance: Catalyst for Productive Urban Futures.
- (d) Integrated governance in spatial planning for a more Just, Green, and Healthy Urban Future.
- (e) Innovation and Technology for Inclusive Urban Futures.
- (f) Greener Urban Futures.

40. In response to the theme of urban crisis recovery and reconstruction, and to strengthening of UN-Habitat' Domain of Change 4: Effective urban crisis prevention and response, a sixth "extraordinary dialogue on Urban Crisis" was established.

41. Katowice also served as a global example of how integrated planning and the establishment of a new economy based on culture, services, and creativity can attract financing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This was showcased in 11 "SDG#11" zones throughout the city.

42. All high-level roundtables and dialogues were broadcast live on United Nations Web TV. The events received a total of 46,145 views. More than 350 media representatives were registered, including around 200 who attended in person. During the week of the Forum, more than 2,000 news items mentioning UN-Habitat were featured in various media channels. Social media platforms such as Twitter showed a 400 per cent spike in items mentioning UN-Habitat, while coverage on online news platforms was up by (or to?) 500 per cent and newspaper coverage up by (or to?) 200 per cent.

E. Outcomes of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum

1. Katowice Declared Actions

43. At the closing ceremony, the "Katowice Declared Actions: Transforming Our Cities for a Better Urban Future" were presented as voluntary actions and commitments for the next two years and beyond. These included:

- (a) Moving from incrementalism towards fundamental shifts in urban environments, systems of governance and forms of habitation, in line with human rights treaties;
- (b) Focusing on imminent urban crises such as climate and biodiversity emergencies, pandemics, violence and conflicts, and other natural and human-induced disasters that all converge in cities and surrounding territories;
- (c) Reconfirming culture as a core component of local identity;
- (d) Reaffirming that accessibility and universal design are an integral part of the solution to the challenges of urbanization;
- (e) Encouraging all development actors to mobilize their capacities in the United Nations Decade of Action enhance their support to UN-Habitat.

44. Furthermore, as was conveyed by the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly, participants in the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum:

- (a) Encouraged all development actors gathered in Katowice to mobilize their respective capacities in the decade of action by tracking progress through a monitoring and reporting mechanism;
- (b) Made an urgent appeal to all Governments to better fund UN-Habitat to ensure that its mandate is met by enhanced resources and capacity of UN-Habitat;
- (c) Called upon all stakeholders to continue to submit their declared actions until 31 July 2022 through the Urban Agenda Platform, highlighting the transformative nature of their commitments.

2. Legacy projects of the eleventh session of the Forum

(a) National Urban Forums: forum-policy-practice initiative

45. In the run-up to the eleventh session, UN-Habitat co-organized more than 30 national urban forums in all regions, with a focus on helping Member States track the implementation of their national urban policies.

46. As part of the legacy initiatives initiated during WUF10, the National Urban Forums are an integral part of the World Urban Forum, presenting an inclusive, national-level platform that brings multiple stakeholders together around a paradigm shift from policies into practice (forum – policy – practice).³

47. National Urban Policies (NUP) provide an unparalleled opportunity to implement the New Urban Agenda and the SDG11 at large. The 2021 Global state of NUP report, states that 67% of countries reported that National Urban Policies can contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. As of 2021, UN-Habitat is supporting 56 Countries develop their NUP of which 20 are on the implementation phase, 13 are Formulating, 7 at the diagnosis stage, while 6 are undertaking their Feasibility studies.⁴

48. The National Urban Forums and Regional Urban Forums will continue to be organised and implemented in the intersessional period between WUF11 and WUF12.

(b) World Urban Forum Alumni Network

49. The World Urban Forum Alumni Network held a working meeting during the Forum on 28 June 2022, where Alumni members agreed on five broad workstreams and identified workstream focal points. The workstreams were presented at an open session with the participation of UN-Habitat's Executive Director and ministers from the Alumni Network, Egypt, Kenya, and Poland, along with a high-level representative of the United Arab Emirates. The five workstreams are: global think tank; technical advisory; knowledge management; voluntary local reviews; and global projects. The outcomes of the activities will be geared towards evaluation of the Forum and development of the programme cycle for the next edition of the Forum.

(c) The Cities Investment Facility: a project showcase and fair

50. This initiative, launched during WUF10, continued its work during WUF11 and sought to mobilize financing for sustainable development by connecting project preparation facilities and investors with SDG-aligned projects in emerging and frontier markets.

51. After having strengthened the capacity to prepare projects for investments by bringing in additional Implementing Partners, CIF has identified 22 projects to be prioritized for preparation in the 2022-2025 Pilot Phase. Of these 22 projects, so far 4 projects have been resourced and their preparation is in progress. The principal aim is to have these projects showcased for investment at WUF 12.

52. Additionally, a Sustainable Finance Masterclass has been launched and will be held in the second quarter of 2023. The project promoters from the cities will be the main target audience for this capacity building programme. Also, a CIF Feasibility Fund Facility is the funding vehicle for project preparation, and so far, at least 15 donor philanthropic entities and at least 3 donor Member States are being actively engaged to contribute seed funding to the Facility.

(d) Local 2030 Coalition

53. The WUF11 served as a platform to advance the work of UN-Habitat with regards to localising the Sustainable Development Goals and the Local 2030 Coalition. The Local2030 Coalition is the UN System-wide platform and network for supporting and accelerating the localization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is a shared space to mobilize, engage and empower every local actor to bolster the localization of the SDGs. Fourteen UN Agencies, Funds, Programmes, and Offices are also part of the Local2030 Coalition, acting as the advisory body to its Steering Committee. UN-Habitat functions as the Secretariat of the coalition as well as its permanent co-chair (UNDP being the other co-chair, to be succeeded in 2024 by FAO). The WUF legacy fund has supported the Local 2030 Coalition with seed funding and its Alumni Network will be closely related to the coalition as future champions for SDG localisation.

³ WUF11 Outcome Document, para 21- HSP/EB.2022/19

⁴ Global State of National Urban Policy 2021: Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action

F. Additional information

54. More information on the eleventh session of World Urban Forum can be accessed below.

[The WUF11 website.](#)

[Link to the Katowice Declared Actions]

[The IISD reporting website for WUF11.](#)

ADVANCE