

## Opening remarks at the stakeholder dialogue toward the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly

**Date: 22 May 2023**

- **Excellency Zacharia Mwangi Njeru, Cabinet Secretary for Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development**
- **Professor Stephen Kiama, Vice Chancellor of the University of Nairobi**
- **Ambassador Jean Kimani, Permanent Representative of Kenya to UN-Habitat**
- **Colleagues, Friends, Ladies, and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank the convenors of this *Second Stakeholders Dialogue, Towards the Second Session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly*. I participated in a similar stakeholders' dialogue session prior to the First United Nations Habitat Assembly in May 2019.

I am happy to note that stakeholders in Kenya have convened to take stock of the progress made since the first dialogue. Professionals, academicians, the private sector, civil society, and philanthropists; all of you have an important role in monitoring the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the urban-related Sustainable Development Goals indicators.

Allow me to first thank Professor Stephen Kiama, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, for hosting this urban dialogue. I am aware that UN-Habitat and the University of Nairobi are partners in documenting the outcomes of these public urban dialogues. UN-Habitat is open to strengthening and broadening our existing collaboration to promote urban research and generate new knowledge.

Kenya, being among the first countries to mainstream the New Urban Agenda, has National Habitat Committee members trained by UN-Habitat on how to implement the New Urban Agenda. As Mayor in Penang, I too faced challenges in understanding the New Urban Agenda and how to develop local action plans based on its principles. I turned to the universities and civil society for help. Here in Nairobi, I am hopeful that will help the county governors to translate policy into practice.

In the last 45 years, we at UN-Habitat have worked with the Government and stakeholders to help catalyze sustainable urbanization in East Africa. I recall that UN-Habitat, through the Lake Victoria Region City Development Strategies Programme, identified sanitation, waste management, and access to safe drinking water as issues of priority attention in the cities on the lake.

On the other hand, UN-Habitat's Go Blue Project on Kenya's coast recently found that waste from coastal cities is leaking into the Indian Ocean. In fact, 31% of plastic waste in Taita Taveta County's municipalities ended up in municipal drainage channels and rivers and eventually into the ocean.

As UN-Habitat is about to sign into the Habitat Country Program with the Government of Kenya, we are prioritizing collaborative actions with universities and research academics in supporting its implementation. The Habitat Country Program will also offer opportunities to jointly support counties in addressing urban-related challenges in Kenya and to feed into existing academic programs to elevate the urban agenda.

As we engage in today's dialogue under the theme "*A sustainable urban future through inclusive and effective multilateralism: achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in times of global crises*," I look forward to learning from Kenyan stakeholders on how to do better when implementing the New Urban Agenda and helping Member States achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

This meeting with stakeholders of the New Urban Agenda and the Habitat Agenda partners comes at a most opportune moment. We need your support and participation in the Global Stakeholders Meeting on 3 and 4 June in the run-up to the second United Nations Habitat Assembly taking place from 5-9 June.

I suggest that we begin to prepare for the Assembly by thinking practically, as only action on the ground can lead to transformative change. I recommend that you consider the following:

- 1) How do we build greater resilience to pandemics, disasters, and planetary crises to improve local sustainable urbanization efforts?
- 2) How do we conserve blue economy resources (lakes, rivers, oceans, and seasonal streams) that are under threat from increased human activities on land?
- 3) Can private sector and the public advocate for sustainable solid waste and wastewater management in our cities and human settlements?
- 4) What is the role of professionals (Planners and Architects, for example) in effective land management, terrestrial planning, and marine spatial planning?
- 5) Could stakeholders strengthen ecosystem conservation through greening public spaces to mitigate biodiversity loss?
- 6) And what strategies can public stakeholders put in place at the local level to mitigate floods and displacements of population, as we saw during the recent flooding in the country?

UN-Habitat's inclusive approach considers the active engagement with stakeholders as a main enabler for the successful implementation of Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda. In this context, a new policy for facilitating stakeholders' engagement in the public meetings of Member States will require all of you to better self-organize. I am confident that the stakeholders of Kenya will be among the most well-prepared participants. I am looking forward to welcoming your input to the greatest challenges of our times, including adequate housing, climate adaptation, better urban crisis management, and the financing of the SDGs.

Together we can ensure a better quality of life for all in our urbanizing world.

Thank you!