



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Executive Director of UN-Habitat speech at the closing of the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly

Date: 9 June 2023

- Honorable President of the Second Session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly,
- Distinguished Members of the Bureau,
- Excellencies,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- Dear Colleagues,
- Dear Friends,

Thank you for your support and for the time all of you spent with us these last five days. The first part of the second regular session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly continues to be a demonstration of effective and efficient multilateralism. Thank you all for keeping the Nairobi spirit of consensus and collegiality well and alive.

I am very happy that Member States continue to prioritize adequate housing and sustainable urbanization as the key to sustainable development. During the first United Nations Habitat Assembly, we had 37 Member States represented at the ministerial and deputy ministerial level. At the High-Level Meeting in New York last year, 83 member states inscribed statements, and 46 ministers and deputy ministers attended. I am very happy to report that 52 ministers and 37 deputy ministers attended the second United Nations Habitat Assembly.

The total number of participants badged was 3,280 (as of Thursday), with 1,190 from national governments, 149 from academia, 403 from civil society, 66 from foundations, 321 from local & regional governments, 635 from the United Nations and 268 from the private sector. A total of 1000 attended online. This is twice as big as the first United Nations Habitat Assembly.

In terms of resolutions, I am very pleased that Member States endorsed 10 resolutions. We have indeed heard and reacted positively to the voices of the people we serve. The decision on adequate housing and slum transformation, among others, have reinstated and reinforced the core mandate of UN-Habitat.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency Mr Silvio Alburquerque, the Chair of the Executive Board and all the members of the Executive Board for his stewardship and inspiring leadership.

Let me express my gratitude to the Drafting Committee, led by the High Commissioner of Pakistan and the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and, her co-facilitators, Portugal, Morocco, Somalia, Nigeria and Tanzania for the sterling work steering the drafting committee. I wish to also thank you, delegates, for flexibility, collegiality, collaboration, staying late at night, and ensuring the success of the Assembly. Many of you began this journey since the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives. I am pleased to say we can see the fruits of our journey.

My Gratitude to the Committee of the Whole, led by the High, Commissioner of Ghana for the smooth conduct of that Committee and ensuring that the resolutions, Decisions and Ministerial Declaration.

My sincere gratitude to Mexico, who has been with us for the last four years and in that respect, I wish to thank President Ramon Meyer for taking us through the first part of the session but had to leave due to an unexpected urgency.

I am truly grateful to Ghana, who immediately stepped into the role seamlessly. Mr. President, Martin Korsah, my sincere gratitude for your stewardship of the session to an end and for the human resources Ghana released to make this Assembly successful.

Let me also highlight the powerful and thought-provoking statements that Member States delivered at the plenary sessions. The President of the Republic of Kenya highlighted the key role of adequate housing as the basis for sustainable urbanization. I thank His Excellency, for his presence at the opening and for urging the Assembly to strengthen UN-Habitat's capacity to lead a multilateral agenda for inclusive, safe, sustainable, and resilient human settlements.

I would also like to thank the Vice President of Botswana conveying the important message from his country about climate change and urban resilience. My condolences to the President and the First Lady for their loss. Botswana's support is much appreciated.

I am truly grateful to our Presidential Champions as well as our Goodwill Ambassador Her Royal Highness the Princess Lamia of Saudi Arabia. I appeal to Member States to please champion our cause for adequate housing and sustainable urbanization.

Let me also recall the statement of His Excellency Abdul Kalam Abdul Momen, Minister of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of BANGLADESH, who reminded us about his country's work in disaster risk reduction and called on UN-Habitat to contribute to norm setting to support climate migrants. It is important to understand that what befalls one Member State might very well be the new normal for the rest of us. My heart goes out to the victims of extreme climate events whether they are living in Canada or Pakistan. Fire and water do not recognise political boundaries. We can expect more climate-related disasters but what we can do is to respond as nations united for the future of humanity.

As highlighted by the Honorable Małgorzata Jarosińska Jedynak, Deputy Secretary of State, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, Republic of Poland, we cannot deliver a better quality of life without civic engagement. Let us make it our priority to remove barriers faced by seniors and individuals with disabilities to ensure no one is left behind.

As I said at the business roundtable, if women are not at the table, we will become part of the menu. Let me recall the profound words of the First Lady of the Republic of Kenya, who really went out of her way to really give focus to our Assembly, as well as the First Lady of the Republic of Türkiye for her wise words and for taking the time to send us a video message. We cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without women and girls. Let me thank my Advisory Group on gender issues (AGGI) who have worked very hard to ensure women are at the table, involved in decision-making and decision-making.

Distinguished delegates,

As Professor Mariana Muzucatto said, “we need a mission driven approach” to achieving the right to housing for all. It is indeed a historic moment for humanity that Member States have endorsed the right to housing as a fundamental human right. It is the basis for sustainable development. We might be 77 years behind but better late than never. I am happy to see adequate housing forming the basis for a better quality of life for all in our urbanizing world.

On that note, let me take the opportunity to thank the stakeholders of the New Urban Agenda and other major groups, all of whom were represented at the Assembly. I am grateful for their input and sharing of their expertise. In their declaration at UNHA2, they have pledged to commit to partnering for the development of universal access to adequate housing with basic services in well-planned neighborhoods for all. They further commit to partnering in urban climate action and supporting local and regional environmental sustainability and urban biodiversity. They also support programs and strategies to strengthen urban crisis recovery. I am very happy to take note of their commitment to continuing the localization of the SDGs. Additionally, they also commit to partnering plans, policies, and programs that generate prosperity and local finance.

We will look back at this week and remember the historic milestones. On that note, allow me to share with you my own 3 heartwarming moments I will always remember.

I will remember this second United Nations Habitat Assembly as a turning point with Member States. Thank you for entrusting my team to help you deliver the promise of the New Urban Agenda. Thank you for entrusting us to help you achieve Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the urban SDGs. Thank you for believing that together we can turbo-charge the implementation of all the other SDGs!

Second, I will remember the first part of the second regular session Assembly as the special moment when Member States recognized the pivotal role of local and regional governments as enablers in helping Member States achieve Sustainable Development Goals. In developing sustainable cities and communities, Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments, Africa, noted the need for enhanced trust, engagement, and accountability between governments. Local action is the most effective demonstration of multilateralism on the ground. It is a way to set a new social contract for our times. We cannot do it without the support and active involvement of our younger generation.

Finally, I take with me the fond memory that together, we really demonstrated that effective multilateralism is possible. Thank you for proving the cynics wrong. Thank you for returning all of us to effective multilateralism. I believe we now have enough to take to the SDG Summit at the General Assembly in September, all on the road to the Summit of the Future in 2024. My team and I are looking forward to working with Member States to implement the extended Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and develop the Strategic Plan 2026-2029 for its adoption at the extended regular session of UNHA in 2025.

I cannot leave the podium without thanking the Government of Kenya, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development for their amazing support. As we mark our 45th anniversary here in Nairobi, we are truly grateful for your warm hospitality, your understanding, and friendship. Please allow me to thank personally the Cabinet Secretary for Housing Mr. Zacharia Mwangi Njeru for all your support. We look forward to working even more closely with you to truly demonstrate the Sustainable Development Goals in Action in Kenya!

Thank you! Asante sana!