



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME  
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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

## Executive Director of UN-Habitat speech at the High-level event at the second United Nations Habitat Assembly “Women Shaping Cities and Communities”

**Date:** 6 June 2023

- Excellency Mama Rachel Ruto,
- Honourable guests
- Distinguished delegates
- Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you, and Karibu Kenya!! I am so proud to welcome all of you to this second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly here in our lovely city of Nairobi!

I would like to start by thanking the Government of Kenya– our hosts for our second United Nations Habitat Assembly, and of course our distinguished guest of honour today, Her Excellency the First Lady of Kenya. I must also extend my gratitude to H.E. Mme. Ermine Erdogan, the First Lady of Türkiye for her very gracious message.

As the Secretary-General said: “We cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without the contributions of women and girls.” We all know that women are key to sustainable urban development. As I said the other day at the Business Roundtable, we must have women at the table. This is because if you are not at the table, you will be on the menu!

We must ensure that the participation of women and girls decision-making at community level. We are very fortunate to have with us Mama Ruto, a leader who is helping other women to fulfil our potential to be leaders at all levels – **local, regional, national, international.**

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, we have **only seven years left** to achieve the ambitious promises of the Sustainable Development Goals. We cannot afford to exclude women and girls. Now, more than ever, we need their voices, knowledge, expertise and creativity. In 2021, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we learned that an estimated 435 million women and girls are living in extreme poverty. The time for action is now.

At UN-Habitat, we are taking a gender-transformative approach across all of our work. I strongly encourage the teams to not merely respond to the different, intersectional experiences of women but to contribute to transforming the structures that continue to keep women far behind.

Let me start with women's access to housing, land and property rights. Women continue to face discrimination around owning, inheriting and administering housing, land, and property. For example, in many contexts, women carry out the majority of labour on the land, yet they are unable to own it and effectively make decisions about its administration. This reflects the limited decision-making power within their families and communities. It places women at a far greater risk of losing access to family land, which can result in poverty, exploitation and sexual violence.

I am very proud of the important work my colleagues at UN-Habitat, together with our partners, are doing to empower women by increasing their access to land and property rights. In Afghanistan, we were able to ensure that women were included in land titles. To the women and children of Afghanistan, I would like to say that UN-Habitat will stay and serve.

I am equally proud to tell you that one of our participatory planning tools, the digital Her City toolbox. This toolbox has been applied in over 350 cities in over 100 countries. We know that cities planned with women and girls result in cities that work better for everyone. Participatory planning, particularly public spaces that take into account the needs of women and girls, become more inclusive, equal and sustainable.

Finally, let me briefly touch on our Women-Led Cities initiative, which aims to promote women's leadership and economic empowerment through partnerships and impact investing. We know that excluding women from urban decision-making has led to poor standards of living. By empowering women leaders, the potential for transformative change is massive. Together we can drive sustainable urbanization together.

Of course, addressing inequality should be everyone's main priority, this is not a job for women alone.

**All of us must stand for gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls and all those discriminated against due to their gender and identity.**

Together we stand, today, tomorrow and going forward because our **commitment does not end with the UN-UN-Habitat Assembly**. Our commitment to our sisters worldwide, especially to those whose voices have been excluded and silenced, carries us forward, until we have achieved cities for all that are truly equal and inclusive.

Finally, this session is really for **you, distinguished First Lady and for women leaders everywhere**. I am very excited to hear from you, and I know we have so much to learn from each other!

**Thank you. Asante Sana.**