

Briefing by the Acting Executive Director to Member States on the 2024 first session of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat

Hybrid format – Friday, 26 April 2024

11:00-13:00 hrs. East Africa Time (EAT)

Statement by the Acting Executive Director

[Slide 1: Welcome]

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Good morning to all of you. I warmly welcome you to this briefing session today on the 2024 first session of the Executive Board which will take place on 6-8 May, and would like to provide you with status updates on several issues, including the preparations of the 2024 first session of the Executive Board, and the implementation of UN-Habitat Assembly Resolutions. Related to this, I will use the opportunity to give you a number of other strategic updates that UN-Habitat is currently involved in, both in our normative and operational capacities.

[Next: Slide 2: Some updates on the preparations of the 2024 1st EB session]

During the first Executive Board session of 2024 next month, we will go into more details on the issues I am raising today, so I will only briefly touch on the status of some of the processes. I would like to highlight two issues related to UN-Habitat's financial situation: the report on the financial situation presents the renewed stability of the non-earmarked Foundation, with revenue last year returning to pre-pandemic levels, and net assets at their highest level since 2016. The report on the draft work programme and budget includes the proposed budget level for 2025 maintained as the same level as this year, with an option that is in line with the endorsed scalability model. You will be updated in detail on the draft during the Executive Board session.

Now let me give you some key highlights on the resolutions. **Resolution 2** on informal settlements has seen the development of a technical support desk with existing human and financial resources. A global publication on the transformation of informal settlements is also under development, together with a technical guideline for a multi-partner approach. Under **Resolution 3**, we are currently exploring running expressions of interest to host World Cleanup Day from 2024 onwards, with the date set for 20 September. **Resolution 4** implementation is advancing well, with support from SIDA on initiating normative work and guidelines. A toolkit is being developed, and the establishment of an advisory group is under discussion. Through **Resolution 5**, the plan is to operationalize the SURGe initiative by the 12th WUF this year, and to scale up the RISE UP portfolio through standardized methodologies and tools, capacity trainings, and new pipeline projects. Under **Resolution 8**, the Our City Platform is to be expanded and integrated with other themes and initiatives in-house, and the focus is on building capacities and labs or centres of excellence to implement specific tools. Through **Resolution 9**, we aim to create a framework in which we mobilize a network of partners around early warning, foresight, risk reduction, crisis response and post-crisis recovery, in order to develop strategic joint programs. We are re-activating the emergency response fund to support the operationalization of this framework globally. Lastly, **Resolution 10** focuses on updating resolution tracking and information sharing mechanisms, and so far we have already set up the urban action funding window in the financial system.

[Next: [Slide 3: UN Summit of the Future](#)]

Excellencies, let me now move to give you an update on relevant global processes.

Preparations for the Summit of the Future (22-23 September 2024) are now well advanced, with negotiations underway on the **Summit outcome** (the Pact for the Future) led by Germany and Namibia, and a revised text expected from the co-facilitators in mid-May. The zero drafts of the **Declaration on Future Generations**, co-facilitated by Netherlands and Jamaica, and the **Global Digital Compact**, co-facilitated by Sweden and Zambia, were issued on 26 March and 1 April respectively, with written feedback from Member States due by the end of April in each case.

The co-facilitators have each created regular opportunities for multi-stakeholder input to the Summit preparations, and the flagship civil society mobilization will take place in Nairobi on 9-10 May 2024. UN-Habitat is participating in the Civil Society Conference in several ways, including my own high-level engagements where possible, a booth for our World Urban Forum, and events on people-centred smart cities and SDG localization, among others.

For UN-Habitat, the Summit of the Future presents a great opportunity to contribute to these highly relevant global processes, by ensuring that the local perspectives and voices from our constituencies, meaning local and regional governments as well as the city residents and civil society communities we serve, are heard and incorporated into crucial global documents. The Pact for the Future will pave the way forward for renewed multilateral action on sustainable development worldwide and how to hold governments accountable. Together with a Group of Friends, we have formulated and shared a Non-Paper to highlight the important role that local governments play in the rollout and implementation of the Pact.

[Next: [Slide 4](#): SG's Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments]

Yesterday, the Secretary General convened a meeting with the Advisory Group members on Local and Regional Governments. In it, he recognized the role that local and regional leaders play in an increasingly uncertain world that faces conflict, both climate-related and socio-economic, providing hands-on solutions to face old and new challenges, and bridge a divergence of views and divisions, with innovation, resilience and responsibility. The purpose of the Advisory Group is for the UN to consider ways to strengthen inclusive multi-level governance and make multilateral institutions more effective, with clear perspectives and engagements from the local level.

Next steps for the Advisory Group include an exploration whether the group could be formalized with the ECOSOC to provide a more differentiated space for local and regional governments at platforms like the High-Level Political Forum. The group's intention is also to reach the deliberations of Member States in the run-up to the Summit of the Future, and to ensure the inclusion of the local and regional government constituency within the multilateral system more broadly.

[Next: [Slide 5: Local2030 Coalition](#)]

Also under the Local2030 agenda, I am glad to report that the work of the Local2030 Coalition is well underway. FAO has taken over as the new co-chair of the Coalition, from UNDP. Two new working groups are being established, namely: 1. Localizing the six SDG transitions, where UN-Habitat is one of the leading focal points, and 2. Financing the six transitions at the local level. The Coalition also recently endorsed the **SDG Localization Marker**, which will ensure that joint initiatives supported by the Joint SDG Fund effectively prioritize localization efforts. This means that 27 invited countries will receive funding when they meet the minimum criteria on SDG

localization efforts, which is USD 250,000 per country. The first tranche of funds will be distributed by early May, on a rolling basis. Lastly, a new cohort of the Steering Committee will take office this year for the period 2024-2025, with a Steering Committee meeting taking place in Nairobi on 9 May 2024 in Nairobi.

The operationalization of our Bilbao office has accelerated, with several positions under recruitment, thanks to close cooperation with the Government of Spain. I was there earlier this month and am very happy about the progress I witnessed.

In this context, let me highlight two areas where UN-Habitat has a clear added value: First, **Resolution 6 on localization**. During the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly, the first-ever resolution on Localizing the SDGs was passed. It was raised by Brazil and co-sponsored by twelve other member states¹. It aims at promoting the localization of the SDGs and to bolster local action to accelerate the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, recognizing the role of cities, local governments and communities, as well as the need to advance multilevel governance to achieve the SDGs. UN-Habitat is uniquely equipped to successfully implement this resolution through its political, normative and operational mandates. Second, **UN-Habitat's SDG Cities Flagship programme**, which aims to support 1000 cities to accelerate their achievement of SDGs, positively impacting 1 billion lives, by offering a systematic way to support cities becoming sustainable and resilient. SDG Cities reaches scale through digital diagnostic tools and technical support hubs for cities, building opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration, boosting recognition of individual cities' progress on achieving the SDGs, and unlocking investments in high

¹ Argentina, Botswana, Chile, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, Italy, Malaysia, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Sweden

impact projects within cities. The programme is already implemented successfully in 18+ cities, with tremendous scaling potential.

[Next: [Slide 6: Preparations of our next Strategic Plan](#)]

Excellencies,

UN-Habitat is in the middle of a highly relevant process, namely to formulate its new cycle of a Strategic Plan. We recently concluded a staff retreat, organized by our newly constituted Task Force to develop our new Strategic Plan, in which we sought ideas and perspectives from colleagues. The task force has also circulated an online survey for staff members all around the world, gathering insights into what colleagues might want to see included in the upcoming Strategic Plan, and what worked well in the previous cycle.

Taking into consideration previous processes, as well as feedback gathered from external assessments of our current Strategic Plan, several regional retreats with Member States are planned, with the Africa region kicking off its deep dive into the new UN-Habitat strategic plan development.

The Task Force is also working on a draft background paper for a general Member State retreat, which will be finalized later this year. In the retreat, Member States will have the chance to flesh out priorities and goals, focusing on leveraging UN-Habitat's strengths and key impact areas.

[Next: [Slide 7: COP29 preparations](#)]

UN-Habitat has proposed to the COP29 Presidency a full day event centered around a **Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change**. This builds on the

Ministerial Meetings at COP27 and COP28 (where 60 Member States were present) and the first-ever Local Climate Action Summit at COP28, which attracted 250 mayors. Expected outcomes include: first, showcasing how stronger collaboration between local and national governments can advance climate action; second, taking stock of progress on the implementation of CHAMP and identify the roadmap ahead in view of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) revision process; and third, identifying how to accelerate local climate finance.

For the first time ever, this Ministerial Meeting will convene several thematic roundtables to facilitate in-depth discussions on multilevel climate action, responding to UN-Habitat's **Resolution 5** adopted during the last UN-Habitat Assembly. It will bring together different Ministerial portfolios, including **Ministers of Environment** who are responsible for negotiating global climate agreements and leading the NDC revision process; **Ministers of Urbanization and Housing** who will then need to translate these NDCs into action in their urbanization strategies; and **Mayors** who are responsible for implementing these strategies at the local level. A full-day series of Ministerial Meetings might become the cornerstone of a Cities and Urbanization Day at COP29. After a high-level opening, several complementary thematic and practical roundtables will be held, focusing on buildings, transport, nature, finance, and capacity building.

Why is a Ministerial Meeting at COP29 strategic? 2024 must be a year of concentrated efforts to work with Mayors, Ministers of Housing and Urbanization, and the Ministers of Environment who are often responsible for updating the NDCs, to work together in the 2025 NCD revision progress which is due at COP30. COP29 in Baku presents an opportunity to facilitate dialogues between these different stakeholders at the global level, take stock of progress and align the roadmap ahead.

[Next: Slide 8: 1st session of the inter-governmental working group on housing]

Excellencies, I will give you a few more updates on global processes that are aligned with our recently adopted Resolutions.

In March, the Global Forum on Buildings and Climate took place in Paris. This was a very rich platform to share UN-Habitat's experiences, expertise and also promote the recently adopted resolution on adequate housing. What came out strongly is that multilevel governance for climate action remains more important than ever. Many sessions I participated in highlighted the critical need for a paradigm shift in the way we design, build, and manage housing to ensure it is safe, affordable and accessible to all, without exacerbating climate change, resource scarcity, and biodiversity loss. Innovative and data-driven approaches and inclusive financing mechanisms are needed now to achieve this goal.

The recently adopted United Nations Habitat Assembly **Resolution 7** on “Adequate Housing for All” is a crucial vehicle of implementation for the housing sector transformation as it unites governments and stakeholders behind this ambitious agenda, providing a regular framework for collective action and knowledge sharing. In this context, our recently established Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Adequate Housing for All intends to conduct consultations with the Executive Board, and later this year will circulate documents for its inaugural meeting planned for late 2024 – the EB will confirm dates. Pending financial contributions, officers will then be elected, as well as rules of procedure and proposed work programmes adopted. UN-Habitat has also initiated an assessment of potential platforms and resources for collecting and sharing data, tools, resources and best practices on adequate housing for all.

[Next: [Slide 9: International Guidelines on People-Centred Smart Cities](#)]

Excellencies,

As you know during UNHA2, **Resolution 1** on people-centred smart cities was passed, with a request for UN-Habitat to lead the development of international guidelines. Since then, 31 experts have been selected to produce the guidelines, in close collaboration with member states. The first in-person meeting of the Expert Working Group took place on 16-18 April in Strasbourg, France, in which the draft outline and thematic focus of the guidelines were discussed. The group is regularly exchanging online, ensuring that the guidelines speak on all important aspects such as inclusivity, human rights, data privacy, digital infrastructure, interoperability, environmental sustainability and shared prosperity. The guidelines are set to be adopted by member states at the resumed second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly in June 2025. In parallel, we are currently producing the World Smart Cities Outlook, with rich data and lessons from around the world on the latest practices and approaches on people-centred smart cities.

[Next: [Slide 10: WUF preparations](#)]

Excellencies,

As you are well aware, our next World Urban Forum is around the corner, taking place in Cairo on 4-8 November. Under the theme “It All Starts at Home”, our goal is to translate global urban change ideals into tangible, localized actions, by fostering practical transformations within cities and communities. Where are we in the preparations? Since opening general registrations on the website, we have already registered nearly 3000 participants from 140 countries, and have also just extended our call to host partner-led events, as the interest has been tremendous. Invitations to all

Member States via our Secretariat of Governing Bodies, and in close cooperation with the Egyptian Government, are well underway, with official invites to line ministers, mayors, and heads of organizations going out starting this week. Several high-level invitations will come directly from me to prominent personalities and thought leaders. I would like to reiterate that you are encouraged to mobilize support from your Government's leadership to participate in this crucial global urban event.

We will host six main sessions as follows: (1) Housing our future; (2) Cities and the climate crisis; (3) Stronger together; (4) Financing localization and localizing finance; (5) Putting people first in a digital era; and (6) The loss of home. These dialogues will be complemented by several crucial assemblies and roundtables, focusing on the voices of women; children and youth; local and regional governments; the business community; persons with disability; academia; ministers; indigenous people and more. Special sessions will also be curated to inspire action and foster sustainable solutions for the future of cities, and partner-led events will illustrate the broad diversity of initiatives undertaken by urban actors and UN-Habitat partners from around the world. As you can see, this year's WUF is likely to become the most significant event shaping our global urban future and agenda just yet.

[\[Next: Slide 11: G7 Italy Presidency\]](#)

We congratulate Italy once again for assuming the G7 presidency. In this context, we are glad to report that the G7 Urban Development track is back, and meetings of Senior Urban Development Officials (SUDO), both online and in-person, have recently commenced with UN-Habitat's participation. The first in-person SUDO meeting in Rome is now scheduled for 21-22 May, with our colleague Shipra attending. These meetings precede the Urban Development Ministers' meeting, which is

planned for 17-19 November in Genova, which I, or our new Executive Director if appointed by then, will attend.

[Next: Slide 12: EB logistics: List of delegations and registration for the session]

Excellencies,

A quick note on some logistical aspects of the upcoming session. **The registration for the session** opened on 25 March 2024 as scheduled, and will close on 2 May 2024 at 2 pm East Africa Time.

We request all delegates to register for the session and in addition, we would be grateful to receive formal communication from the Permanent Missions on the list of respective delegations as required by the rules of procedure. We appreciate that quite a number of Missions have already sent in their lists.

As you can see on the screen, **onsite badging following online registration** will take place on the times outlined on the presentation. The location for delegates not holding a UNON ground pass to collect their badge is the at the **UNON Pass & ID office** right by the entrance to the complex.

[Next: Slide 13: EB logistics: Regional consultations and additional information]

Provisions for regional consultations by each regional group during the session have been made and the Division of Conference Services has assigned rooms for each regional group. The groups will mainly meet in the morning prior to the start first plenary meeting of each day.

Additional information on the session including pre-session documents, programme and information for participants are available on the dedicated website for the session as shown on the screen.

[Next: [Slide 14: Other updates](#)]

Excellencies, I would like to zoom in on UN-Habitat's response to the Gaza crisis. During our most recent mission to the region, it was established that our added value to the reconstruction and recovery planning efforts will be a neighbourhood and tailored approach to transitional shelter solutions, and we are exploring building a coalition with partners on this. Our expertise in the area has been widely recognized, among the Palestinian Authority, donors and the RCO. We are actively pursuing partnerships with key partners such as the World Bank, UNOPS, ACTED, the Norwegian Refugee Council and others, and might also explore using data coordination platforms such as the one developed by UN-Habitat in Iraq previously, as there is interest from the Authority in its implementation. The draft Executive Board report on the reconstruction in Gaza was very helpful, but should only be a preliminary report for now. There is value in it beyond the next EB session, with challenges recognized on immediate human needs, unclear and changing timelines and scenarios of actions that can be taken. However, we remain committed to addressing all issues highlighted in the report.

To change the topic, the plans are well underway with the Government of Mozambique to welcome distinguished Executive Board members on the **field trip to Mozambique**, taking place from 3-7 June 2024. We are still finalizing the itinerary including exact locations, but we are assessing Maputo, Beira and Pemba where we have active programs. Our country program is over 17 in existence, with a strong

focus on sustainable urbanization, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation and resilient housing. Our hope is that EB members will benefit from a rich insight into our programming on the ground, learning from some best practice projects and successful multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Lastly, our Joint Bureaux Meeting in Mexico was a success, with 20 representatives from 9 Member States attending, plus UN-Habitat colleagues from the region and headquarters. In addition to important discussions on UN-Habitat's governing structure, upcoming meetings and ongoing institutional processes, the delegates were able to conduct a field trip, visiting inspiring UN-Habitat projects and learning about our work in Mexico in areas of public space, culture, and inclusive urban upgrading.

I thank you for your attention, and look forward to a fruitful first Executive Board session this year.