

Speech by the Executive Director, UN-Habitat
Ms. Anaclaudia Rossbach
Opening of the Resumed Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly
Thursday 29 May 2025

Hon. Alice Wahome the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development of Kenya

Excellencies,

Honourable Ministers

Permanent Representatives,

Honourable Mayors,

My dear colleague Executive Director of UNEP Ms. Inger Anderson

Delegates, Colleagues and Friends,

It is an honour to welcome you to the Resumed Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly here at the United Nations Headquarters in Nairobi. I thank each of you for your presence and unwavering commitment to the mandate of UN-Habitat.

This Assembly represents the highest global platform for normative discussions on sustainable urbanization and human settlements. It is a moment of collective reflection, renewed political will and forging consensus for the future we seek for our cities and communities.

Excellencies,

As we approach the final year of the implementation of our current Strategic Plan (2020–2025), I am pleased to report that it has provided a clear and adaptable framework that has guided our work amid an increasingly complex global landscape. It has enabled us to deliver more context-specific programming across diverse settings. We have supported housing reconstruction in conflict-affected areas, advanced climate-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable regions, and strengthened our capacity to innovate, build partnerships, and respond swiftly to emerging needs. These efforts have enabled us to deliver tangible results at scale, for the people we serve.

In parallel with the implementation of our Strategic Plan, we have taken important steps to advance the resolutions adopted by this Assembly. To only name 3 milestones, among many:

- under **resolution 2/1** (International guidelines on people-centred smart cities) UN-Habitat has developed the Guidelines through a global consultative process involving regional and thematic inputs. It also established a Global Expert Working Group to ensure the guidelines reflect inclusive, rights-based, and context-specific approaches to digital urban development.
- under **resolution 2/2** (Accelerating the transformation of informal settlements and slums by 2030, we launched the Global Action Plan focusing on transforming informal settlements and slums by 2030 through coordinated global efforts. It also aligned regional strategies, like the SADC Regional Strategy, to ensure integrated and locally relevant action.
- under **resolution 2/7 (Adequate Housing for All)**, UN-Habitat successfully convened the inaugural session of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Working on Adequate Housing for All, **the first-ever UN body dedicated exclusively to addressing housing issues worldwide.**
- under **resolution 2/6 (Localizing the SDGs)**, we have created the **Partnership Platform on Localizing the SDGs**, to gather national governments and provide direct technical support to develop National SDG Localization Frameworks.

For the years to come, we remain committed to fulfilling the mandates that you have entrusted UN-Habitat with implementing. We have already created a dedicated online resolution tracker and urban action funding window and drafted a Strategic Plan that is underpinned by all 15 UNHA resolutions and Decisions.

Excellencies,

We now turn to the future.

The new Strategic Plan 2026–2029 is anchored in addressing one of the most urgent and universal development challenges of our time: **the global housing crisis**. Today, more than 2.8 billion people are inadequately housed. Over 1.1

billion live in informal settlements or slums, and more than 300 million are homeless. Without action, this crisis will continue to undermine efforts to reduce poverty, advance equality, and deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Strategic Plan positions housing, land, and basic services at the centre of our mandate. It is a plan to deliver impact where it matters most and to do so in partnership, with urgency, and at scale. This approach is especially critical at a time when our cities are bearing the brunt of multiple, overlapping crises: from conflict and displacement to the escalating impacts of climate change. Today, over 122 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The vast majority now seek refuge, livelihoods, and safety in cities. Our role in supporting urban recovery and housing reconstruction in conflict-affected areas is more vital than ever.

At the same time, we are witnessing increasing heatwaves, floods, storms, and droughts with devastating consequences particularly in the Global South. The world is on course to surpass the 1.5°C global warming threshold. Without decisive climate action particularly in cities our chances of achieving SDG11, is in serious jeopardy.

In this pivotal moment, I call on member states to adopt the Strategic Plan 2026–2029 in the Nairobi spirit of consensus and shared responsibility. Let us act decisively to tackle the global housing crisis and ensure sustainable urbanization for those we serve.

Excellencies,

We meet at a time when the multilateral system is under increasing pressure to be more, efficient and responsive. The UN80 initiative reimagines the UN around the principles of innovation and impact and UN-Habitat is fully aligned with this vision.

We have taken important steps to improve internal systems by enhancing financial oversight, streamlining human resources, refining our delegation of authority, and deploying digital tools to boost transparency and efficiency.

But our greatest impact continues to be felt on the ground.

Excellencies,

Over the past year, UN-Habitat delivered transformative results in more than 100 countries, advancing sustainable urban development. We improved access to

clean water in Nigeria and Myanmar, supported land and housing rights in Nepal, and helped shape inclusive housing policies across Ghana and the Arab States.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, we worked with local governments to strengthen SDG reporting, urban programmes, and land management.

We accelerated climate action in Mongolia, Cambodia, the Philippines, and across Africa through climate budgeting and resilience planning. In Jordan and Lebanon, we deployed nature-based water solutions and clean energy in public institutions, while promoting sustainable waste management and food security.

In Colombia, Bolivia, and Brazil, we supported climate-responsive urban planning and mobilized funding for ecosystem protection and community uplift. We also strengthened planning systems in Africa, supported smart city solutions in Asia-Pacific, and deepened local leadership through initiatives like the Arab Mayors Academy and participatory planning in Brazil.

In fragile contexts such as Mozambique, Somalia, Afghanistan, Gaza, Yemen, Ukraine and Syria we built homes, secured land rights, and rehabilitated infrastructure to support recovery and stability in communities affected by crisis. These integrated efforts reflect our unwavering commitment to sustainable urban transformation that leaves no one behind.

Excellencies,

We are not working alone. Our partnerships with sister UN agencies have been deepened and expanded. We are proud to co-chair the Local2030 Coalition and serve as its Secretariat bringing together UN entities to localize the SDGs. We are advancing the partnership with UNEP on Greener Cities aiming to integrate environmental sustainability into urban development by mainstreaming environmental considerations into urban policymaking and incorporating urban perspectives into environmental policymaking.

We have signed new collaboration agreements with UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, UNHCR, and others, to advance integrated responses to urban challenges.

We are also deepening our engagement with International Financial Institutions, with a focus on enhancing the capacity of cities to access financing for impactful urban projects and aligning IFIs' investment criteria with local realities. Recently, we pledged a joint statement to strengthen collaborative efforts with IFIs, national governments, local and regional governments, and international organizations to advance sustainable urban development.

We are also building momentum towards the Thirteenth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13), which will be held from 17 to 22 May 2026 in Baku, Azerbaijan under the theme “*Housing the World: Safe and Resilient Cities and Communities.*” I invite all Member States and stakeholders to play an active role in shaping this key global forum and in advancing the priorities of the new Strategic Plan.

Excellencies,

Now more than ever, sustained commitment and collaboration are essential to ensuring no one is left behind. We deeply appreciate the timely core contributions from Member States, which enable effective planning and implementation of our programmes. We also welcome the support from new and returning donors and express our gratitude to consistent contributors whose ongoing partnership remains a vital pillar of our work. We encourage all Member States yet to contribute to do so promptly, as early remittances are key to maintaining the predictability and sustainability of our operations in advancing sustainable urban development.

Excellencies,

At this pivotal juncture in UN-Habitat’s mandate, let us reaffirm our collective commitment to sustainable urbanization. The challenges we face are complex, but with your continued support, we can deliver tangible results and ensure that no one is left behind.

I thank you.