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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

PRESS RELEASE

World Cities Day 2025 urges to put people first in smart urbanization

As cities worldwide grow and digital technologies rapidly reshape daily life, UN-Habitat is calling for a people-centred model of smart cities – ones where innovation serves citizens, bridges divides, and drives inclusive urban transformation.

Bogotá, 31 October 2025 – The global observance of World Cities Day 2025 took place in Bogotá, Colombia, under the theme “People-centred smart cities.” Mandated by the UN General Assembly and celebrated annually on 31 October, World Cities Day promotes global action for sustainable urbanization and international cooperation to create inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities.

This year’s theme highlights how technology, data, and artificial intelligence can transform urban life when designed and deployed around the needs of people. The event showcased examples of cities using digital innovation to improve access to housing, land, water, sanitation, and mobility, while promoting transparency and civic participation.

In his official message for the Day, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said: “In our increasingly digital world, technology is reshaping urban life. From early warning systems to geospatial mapping to participatory platforms, digital tools can improve basic services, strengthen resilience, and create greener spaces for all. But innovation must close gaps – not widen them. A truly smart city puts people first – especially the most vulnerable.”

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach underlined that technology must advance equality, not exclusion: “Every city should be a place of opportunity for all. Yet nearly three billion people live in inadequate housing, and more than 2.7 billion remain offline. There is nothing smart about a city that leaves people behind. Smart cities must be people-centred – technology should serve citizens, not the other way around.”

Hosted by the City of Bogotá in collaboration with UN-Habitat, the 2025 observance brought together mayors, ministers, urban experts, private sector leaders, and civil society representatives to explore how digital transformation can make cities more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient.

The programme included a high-level opening ceremony, the announcement of the Global Award for Sustainable Development in Cities 2025, and discussions on digital

inclusion, smart governance, innovation in housing and urban services, and the use of AI for equitable urban change.

More than 3,000 participants from 97 countries registered to attend celebrations in Bogotá. Worldwide, World Cities Day activities took place in 28 cities across 21 countries, featuring dialogues, exhibitions, and community actions organized by local and regional governments, UN agencies, and partners.

The event followed a pre-conference on smart governance, inclusion, and resilience, organized by the City of Bogotá on 30 October. Local and regional leaders shared practical experiences in building digital systems that strengthen participation, transparency, and trust in public institutions.

Speaking at the pre-event, Mayor of Bogotá Carlos Galán said: “It is becoming increasingly clear that cities bear the responsibility of leading major social change. They are a melting pot of talent, knowledge, and aspirations of millions of people. As Italo Calvino once said, ‘Cities, like dreams, are built on desires and fears.’ And it is precisely the convergence of these desires, dreams, and abilities, this diversity that comes together in cities.”

Vanessa Velasco, Secretary of Habitat, Bogotá, said: “Housing is where urban life truly happens – it’s where the transformation of the city begins. Through the *Mi Casa en Bogotá* programme, thousands of families are gaining access to well-located, dignified homes, while the city advances its goal of revitalizing more than 20 urban areas and expanding access to quality public spaces. The infrastructure and digital transformation projects we are leading allow us to build a Bogotá that puts people at the centre – a city that grows with equity, sustainability, and purpose.”

First celebrated in Shanghai, China, in 2014, World Cities Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013. The outcomes of the 2025 observance will feed into ongoing global processes, including the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13), to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 17 to 22 May 2026, under the theme “Housing the world: Safe and resilient cities and communities.”

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About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat is the United Nations entity working for sustainable urbanization. With programmes in over 90 countries, it supports policymakers and communities to create socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns. UN-Habitat promotes transformative change in urban areas through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance, and collaborative action. To know more, visit unhabitat.org or follow us on social media @UNHabitat.

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