



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Opening Remarks by Ms. Anaclaudia Rossbach, Executive Director and Under-Secretary-General, UN-Habitat Third Session of the Executive Board 2025, November 2025

H.E. Sebastian Groth, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Germany to UN-Habitat and Chair of the Executive Board,

Honourable Alice Wahome, Cabinet Secretary for Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development,

Honourable Ministers and Mayors,

Distinguished Members of the UN-Habitat Executive Board,

Your Excellencies, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocols observed,

It is my great honour to welcome you to the third session of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat for 2025. Your presence today reaffirms your unwavering commitment to advancing sustainable urbanization and the global development agenda. In an era defined by complex urban challenges and unprecedented opportunities, your leadership and partnership remain essential in shaping a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban future for all.

Excellencies, we convene at a moment when global urban vulnerabilities are deepening across multiple fronts. The housing crisis continues to expand. Today, an estimated 2.8 billion people are affected by inadequate housing conditions; 1.1 billion live in informal settlements; and over 300 million experience homelessness. At the same time, urban crises driven by conflict, forced displacement, and the destruction of homes and essential infrastructure, together with the escalating frequency of climate-related disasters, are placing unprecedented pressure on cities and communities.

Progress toward ensuring universal access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and toward building resilient, inclusive and crisis-responsive cities, remains far too slow. In this context, UN-Habitat's technical, normative and operational role has never been more vital. From supporting post-crisis urban recovery and reconstruction, to strengthening climate adaptation in vulnerable cities, to advancing housing rights and resilience in informal settlements, UN-Habitat is working with Member States and local authorities to address these converging crises with practical, evidence-based solutions. This reality underscores the imperative for renewed political will, strengthened financing, and coordinated global action.

Excellencies, in alignment with the broader United Nations reform agenda and the UN80 vision, UN-Habitat is reinforcing its contribution to a more effective and results-driven UN development

system. UN80 calls for integrated action and greater impact principles that guide our ongoing institutional transformation and the rollout of our Strategic Plan 2026–2029.

UN-Habitat has been actively engaged in the UN80 process, contributing to Secretariat-wide discussions on workforce planning, budget realignment, and strengthened accountability. Our internal reforms are closely aligned with emerging UN80 parameters, including clearer managerial accountability, integrated planning and budgeting, and streamlined support functions.

In this process, we are making every possible effort to consult with members states and working closely with the Staff Union, UNON, and Headquarters in New York to uphold our duty of care and safeguard the wellbeing of our personnel. These combined efforts ensure that UN-Habitat is not only compliant with UN80 requirements but is also positioned as a constructive partner in shaping a more coherent, efficient, and impact-oriented UN development system.

At the same time, Excellencies, we must acknowledge with full transparency that without a sustainable solution to the persistent shortfall in core funding, a structural gap will inevitably emerge. While we are making deliberate efforts to embed more of our normative expertise into programmatic and project-based delivery, as the donor landscape increasingly requires, there remain essential core functions that simply cannot be project-funded. These include global standard-setting, regulatory and policy development, strategic planning, governance support to our Governing Bodies, and our human rights and social inclusion responsibilities. These functions form the backbone of UN-Habitat's mandate, yet they depend on predictable core resources. Unless this structural imbalance is addressed, our ability to serve Member States with the quality, continuity, and authority expected of the UN's focal point for sustainable urbanization will be increasingly at risk.

Excellencies, like many United Nations entities with strong normative mandates, UN-Habitat is increasingly concerned about the global decline in resources available for norm-setting, policy development, knowledge generation, and multilateral coordination. This trend is not unique to UN-Habitat; it is part of a wider contraction affecting the UN development system, and it calls for collective action to safeguard the normative functions that underpin evidence-based policymaking, global standards, and country-level guidance. In this context, we are making every effort to diversify and strengthen project-based financing that supports our normative work, through initiatives such as GWOPA, the National Urban Policies Programme, Local2030, the UN Innovation Technology and Acceleration Lab (UNITAC) in Hamburg, our resilience and climate portfolios, the newly approved Canadian research funding on adequate and accessible housing, and our continued leadership of the World Urban Forum. These programmes play a vital role in sustaining our global policy leadership, but they cannot substitute for predictable core funding. A shared commitment from Member States will therefore be essential to ensure that UN-Habitat's normative mandate remains strong, authoritative, and fully responsive to your needs.

As we streamline our structures, enhance accountability, and strengthen our regional presence, we remain acutely aware of the financial pressures stemming from Regular Budget reductions, UN80 adjustments, and the conclusion of several key funding agreements. We are therefore

taking deliberate steps to mitigate the impact on personnel through prudent resource prioritization, redeployment, and internal mobility, while ensuring that our ability to deliver for Member States remains protected.

UN-Habitat is undertaking a far-reaching institutional reform to become a more coherent, agile, and field-responsive organization aligned with the Strategic Plan 2026–2029. This revised structure has been guided not only by our own strategic direction but also by the key findings and recommendations of recent independent assessments including the OIOS mid-term evaluation of the current Strategic Plan and MOPAN institutional assessment. Together, these evaluations underscored the need to rationalize internal functions, strengthen decentralization, clarify accountability, and stabilize core capacities, principles that directly shaped the new structure. We are equally grateful for the constructive guidance provided by Member States throughout this process, which has played an essential role in refining the final design and ensuring that the structure reflects shared priorities.

A central objective of the revised structure is to reinforce the balance between our normative and operational mandates, ensuring that global policy leadership and country-level implementation mutually support and strengthen each other. The structure decentralizes authority to regional and country offices, streamlines internal roles, and strengthens governance and resource-management systems. One clear example of Member States' impact is the strengthened positioning of the Independent Evaluation Unit. In response to your consistent emphasis on safeguarding its independence and reinforcing its strategic role, the Unit is now placed to report directly to the Executive Director and to the Governing Bodies, reflecting both best practice and the expectations expressed by Member States during consultations.

Importantly, the revised structure reinforces human rights, gender equality, and social inclusion as core UN values and essential pillars of sustainable urbanization. The functions supporting this agenda have been strategically repositioned to strengthen their institutional visibility, enhance advocacy and outreach, and ensure deeper integration across all subprogrammes. We are also working to channel additional resources to reinforce this substantive role, ensuring that human rights and inclusion principles are consistently embedded in both normative guidance and operational delivery at all levels.

Together with new management mechanisms, including the Leadership Management Team and a reformed Programme Management Committee, these measures position UN-Habitat to deliver more effectively, more transparently, and with the agility required to achieve tangible results on the ground.

Looking ahead, we have already initiated preparations for the midterm review of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in 2026, which will culminate in a high-level meeting of the General Assembly in July 2026. This review comes at a defining moment, as the United Nations system and Member States advance the implementation of the Pact for the Future.

A central element of this process is the submission of national reports on New Urban Agenda implementation. These reports are essential for ensuring that each country's achievements, challenges, and priorities are accurately reflected in the Secretary-General's report to the

General Assembly. To date, UN-Habitat has received only 24 of the 58 expected national reports. Unfortunately, reports submitted after the Secretariat's cut-off date cannot be incorporated into the Secretary-General's midterm review report. I therefore strongly encourage all Member States that have not yet done so to submit their reports as soon as possible.

The midterm review will provide a critical opportunity to demonstrate how sustainable urbanization serves as a powerful accelerator of the Pact's commitments, particularly in areas such as financing, digital cooperation, sustainable development, and multilateral reform. It will also offer a vital platform to highlight the collective progress achieved by Member States, local governments, and partners, while renewing global political momentum around urbanization.

UN-Habitat is working closely with the President of the General Assembly, the Office of the Secretary-General, and all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the midterm review becomes a transformational milestone. The timely submission of national reports remains essential to ensuring that Member States' efforts are fully recognized in this process.

In this context, allow me also to acknowledge the important outcomes of the Open-Ended Working Group on Adequate Housing, whose recent session has contributed significantly to strengthening global monitoring of housing adequacy, advancing rights-based housing approaches, and identifying priority actions under the New Urban Agenda. Its recommendations on financing, national policy coherence, and local implementation will directly inform our inputs to the 2026 high-level review and reinforce our collective efforts to address the global housing crisis.

Excellencies, UN-Habitat remains steadfast in supporting Member States with innovative solutions, sustainable practices, and strengthened partnerships to advance adequate housing and sustainable urban development. At the same time, it is important to recall that our mandate is defined through more than 15 resolutions adopted by UN-Habitat Assembly in addition to 64 resolutions from the GA and ECOSOC and 393 resolutions from the Governing Council representing a comprehensive set of normative, programmatic and operational commitments that logically require stable and predictable resources to implement. Yet our ability to fully deliver on these mandates continues to be constrained by persistent financial pressures. As of 15 November, we have received USD 2.95 million in core contributions, representing 63 per cent of the approved 2025 budget and notably below the level received during the same period last year. While we are encouraged by the highest number of contributing Member States since 2020, the overall volume of contributions remains lower, reflecting broader fiscal constraints and shifting global priorities.

It is encouraging to see growing support from across regions. African Member States continue to demonstrate strong solidarity through broad participation in core contributions. We also welcome steady engagement from Asia-Pacific and renewed commitment from several Member States this year. Contributions from WEOG remain essential to sustaining our core normative work, and we are grateful to those who have already contributed in 2025. It is also noteworthy that more Arab States have joined UN-Habitat's core donor base, signalling widening trust and partnership. I am also pleased to highlight important pledges and contributions from

the Latin America and Caribbean region, reflecting renewed engagement and recognition of UN-Habitat's value across LAC. This broadening of our core donor base across all regions is highly encouraging and essential to strengthening the financial foundation of the Programme.

Several additional contributions are still anticipated before year-end, and we are actively engaging at the highest levels to help close the remaining gap and reach the levels achieved in previous years. In this context, sustained and timely core support remains critical to maintain our normative leadership, uphold our duty of care to staff, and ensure predictable delivery for Member States. Allow me to express our sincere appreciation to all governments that have already remitted their contributions, and to encourage those with pending commitments to finalize them as soon as possible.

Excellencies, allow me also to highlight the sustained efforts undertaken this year to strengthen UN-Habitat's resource base. I have engaged extensively with Member States through targeted missions to capitals, advocating not only for strengthened financial support but also for renewed recognition of UN-Habitat's unique normative role and its concrete impact on the ground. These missions have already yielded tangible results. Canada has approved new funding this week to advance research on housing accessibility, an area critical to our global normative leadership. Türkiye has confirmed a significant increase in its annual contribution to the Regional Office, reaching USD 1 million, which will reinforce the Office's ability to serve the region effectively. Germany has just approved the extension of the UNTIAC programme with an additional EUR 3.8 million, further consolidating our capacity to support sustainable urbanization.

In Latin America, my engagement with the State of Rio de Janeiro and several of its municipalities has resulted in multiple new cooperation agreements on sustainable urbanization, local climate action, and territorial resilience, deepening UN-Habitat's strategic footprint in a region that faces acute urban and climate-related challenges.

In Southern Africa, my visit facilitated the signature of a USD 5 million agreement with South Africa to establish a fully operational UN-Habitat country office, an important milestone in strengthening subregional delivery. Likewise, in Botswana, the Government concluded a new Host Country Agreement for the establishment of a country office, which I had the honour of inaugurating jointly with His Excellency the President.

These positive results demonstrate what is possible when strong political engagement, strategic outreach, and Member State leadership come together. We will continue these efforts with determination, in close coordination with Member States, to ensure that UN-Habitat has the resources required to deliver on its mandate, both in global policy leadership and in concrete support to countries and communities.

Excellencies, today's session offers us an opportunity to reflect, to recommit, and to act. UN-Habitat stands ready to work hand in hand with all of you to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, strengthen multilateral cooperation, and ensure that no one is left behind.

I thank you and look forward to our constructive deliberations..