



UN-HABITAT

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 Second Africa Urban Forum, Opening Ceremony, 9 April 2026

Your Excellency, Dr. William Samoei Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya

Your Excellency, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC),

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

Honourable, Judith Nabakooba, Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, Republic of Uganda, Chairperson of the AU Specialized Technical Committee on Public Service, Local Governments, Urban Development and Decentralization – (STC No8),

Honourable, Anar Guliyev, Chairperson, State Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture, National Coordinator of WUF 13,

Honourable , Ministers from across Africa

H.E. Arther Johnson Sakaja, Governor of Nairobi

Honourable, Governors and Mayors,

Honourable , Diplomats

Heads of Delegations

Partners

Distinguished delegates, Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen

All Protocols observed

A very good morning to all of you! [Hamjambo!]

It is an honour to join you here in Nairobi for the Second Africa Urban Forum, at a moment when Africa's urban future and transformation is not just a continental priority, but a global one.

Let me begin by extending our profound gratitude to the Government of Kenya for hosting us as well as commending the African Union Commission for their continued leadership in convening this continental forum for advancing Africa's urban Agenda.

We are gathered here, at pivotal moments.

Converging again after the First Addis Ababa, African Urban Forum in 2024, where participants adopted the Africa Urban Forum Declaration on Sustainable Urbanization for Africa's Structural Transformation", this Second Africa Urban Forum in Nairobi shines the spotlight towards Africa's urban transaction, happening at an unprecedented speed and scale.

Let us reflect how far we have come; From Habitat I and II, when the continent was still perceived as predominantly rural, to forging of the Common Africa Position for Habitat III demonstrated, through a unified continental voice. As we witnessed in Quito, Africa negotiated not as 54 divergent entities, but as one bloc, with one voice.

Today, the story has progressed profoundly. The Continent voice is stronger, clearer, and more essential than ever.

Our theme for this Forum, "Adequate Housing for All: Advancing Socio-economic and Environmental Transformation towards the realization of Agenda 2063" could not have been more, timely.

The Challenge: Housing as the Foundation: Here's the reality we are facing:

Africa is the world's fastest – urbanizing region, with cities growing at an average annual rate of 3.5 per cent, the most rapid urban transaction in human history. By 2050, 6 out of 10 Africans will live in urban areas. 80 per cent of Africa's total population will occur in cities. Over 60 per cent of Africa's total population is under the age of 25. Urban areas are already generating nearly 60 per cent of Africa's GDP, with nearly 60 per cent of people lacking adequate shelter. This is not merely a demographic shift or a shelter issue, but a systemic crisis rooted in the commodification of housing, limited access to land, and the compounded threats from impacts of climate change instability, and related urban vulnerabilities.

Across Africa, this growth is not uniform, while the rural-to-urban migration is a factor, much of Africa's urban growth is now gradually coming from within cities themselves. We also are witnessing the shift in growth occurring primarily in the secondary and intermediary cities.

The rapid urbanization process in Africa (while challenging), offers powerful opportunities to expand access to decent, affordable housing, serviced land, and basic services thus accelerating economic growth and strengthen social cohesion. While cities continue to grow at unprecedented rates, it creates the scale needed to justify and attract investments in infrastructure, housing, and essential amenities. Expanding transport networks, affordable housing, and digital systems in the cities opens the door to improved mobility, greater connectivity, and enhanced productivity. Across the continent, governments and partners are increasingly recognizing urbanization as a driver of inclusive development, enabling them to plan better, mobilize more resources, and implement reforms that make land, housing, and basic services more accessible.

But let us reframe how we view housing. Housing is not just a social expenditure, cost to be minimized, a deficit to be filled. It is the foundational infrastructure for jobs, dignity, and socio-economic transformation. When we invest in adequate housing, we create construction

industries that employ youth, we build resilience against climate shocks, and we provide the stability upon which families and communities thrive.

What this tells us is simple:

Africa's future is urban. Housing is the front line of climate adaptation. But the opportunities of that urban future should continuously be unlocked.

We need to position urbanization and Housing development among the highest priorities in our nations and Continent. I am happy to note that our Collaboration with the African Union has resulted in that. Together with UNECA and Africa Union Commission we came up with the harmonized implementation framework for the New Urban Agenda in Africa, a strategic document that supports member states in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda priorities. I'd like to commend the work of the AU Specialized Technical Committee on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development and Decentralization (AU-STC 8)- Chaired by my sister Hon Judith Seated here. This Specialized committee plays a critical role in guiding the continent through the rapid urbanization trends we are currently witnessing, the committee has strived o promote well-planned, well-governed, and well-resourced cities in the continent. Through the committee, we have the Africa Urban Forum platform to be held every two years just before the World Urban Forum. The work and service of the AUC is commendable and should be emulated by all, on that note, UN-Habitat will always stand with the commission in advancing the Africa Agenda and the vision 2063: The Africa we want.

At UN-Habitat, our response is clear:

And it is against this backdrop, the UN Habitat 2026- 2029 strategic plan positions housing as human rights and a catalyst for achieving broader Sustainable Development Goals, and implementation of the New Urban Agenda through harmonized regional frameworks, tailored to the Continent's unique realities, aspirations and challenges.

We are focusing on three core priorities: adequate housing, land, and basic services for all.

To deliver on this, UN-Habitat is advancing three key areas of work:

- Ending the global housing crisis
- Supporting climate-resilient and inclusive cities
- Strengthening urban governance and finance systems

Across Africa, UN-Habitat is supporting over 40 countries with national urban policies, housing strategies, and planning systems.

Globally, this year 2026 marks a pivotal period,

The ten-year milestone in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. A comprehensive mid-term review of the NUA is critical juncture of its ongoing evaluation, identification of persistent gaps and charting the course for the remaining decade.

The in-depth review and scrutiny against SDG 11, reflecting against a stark reality: that the world is not on track to meet its 2030 targets and vulnerabilities are compounding.

To continuously support the member states in addressing the housing global crisis, the OEWG-H – which was established in June 2023 as a global platform to advance policy guidance, develop practical recommendations and support countries in strengthening integrated and adequately financed housing systems - has over the last one year delivered concrete progress across critical areas including housing finance, social housing, tenure security and the transformation of informal settlements, underscoring the systemic and interconnected nature of housing challenges.

Looking ahead, its 2026 work programme will focus on housing sustainability and resilience, integrated housing policies and land management tools, while ensuring that global guidance is grounded in regional realities, particularly African experiences, through linkages with forums such as this week as well as the WUF13, leading toward actionable recommendations to the UN-Habitat Assembly.

For Africa and its paradigm, these processes carry profound significance.

As UN Habitat, we are also advancing large-scale programmes; from informal settlements transformation to climate resilience initiatives, UN Habitat positions climate-resilient in housing as one of the strongest tools and critical lever for sustainable urban development.

As embedded in our Strategic Plan 2026–2029, I call on all partners to embrace three priorities:

First, put housing and transformation of informal settlements at the centre of national development agendas. Housing is not a sector; it is a cross-cutting driver of economic growth, social stability, and environmental sustainability.

Second, strengthen institutions and systems for transformative change. We need policy, legal, institutional reforms and an enabling environment that will enable local governments to plan, access finance, and deliver inclusive basic services especially to populations living in the informal settlements whilst recognizing the central role of land in the delivery of housing and ecological sustainability in the spirit of the New Urban Agenda; Living no one behind.

Third, learn from within Africa. Solutions exist. How cities can densify, how housing can be reconceptualized as essential social infrastructure, and how partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector can succeed.

Allow me, to recognize Kenya's leadership role on the global housing stage, primarily through two complimentary positions: a Co- Chair of the OEWG-H and a global champion of the Call for Action on Adequate Housing for All", to gathering 25 Countries through the High-Level Round-table on the sidelines of UNGA, in New York. Leading from the front, His Excellency advanced a proposal for a "Coalition of Global Housing Champions". A political platform for heads of states to advocate for inclusive housing policies and mobilize financing. His Excellency, Mr President, I extend my warmest gratitude for the visible progress in urban transformation and the support you give to our mandate as UN Habitat. UN Habitat will continue to collaborate with the

government of Kenya and all partners, through efforts guided by our Strategic Plan 2026-2029, our systems-based approach in strengthening resilience in communities, supporting the delivery of affordable housing, resource mobilization, capacity -building through partnerships for the ultimate realization of sustainable urbanisation in Kenya.

Now, as we connect the key next urban milestone:

We look to the World Urban Forum 13, next month, Africa has an opportunity to display its leadership, precisely because the Global South is now the epicentre of rapid urbanization. We should establish policy and regulatory frameworks that ensure our cities are not just growing but are truly thriving.

The outcomes of this Second African Urban Forum will directly connect into the next global milestone, at the upcoming World Urban Forum 13, to be held next month in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Over the next 3 days of dialogue, Africa should shape its voice. The World Urban Forum will carry that voice onto the global stage.

I strongly encourage those present today to join us in Baku, from the 17 – 22 May 2026. It will be an opportunity to:

- Showcase Africa's leadership on housing and resilience
- Present scalable solutions from across the continent
- Influence global investment and policy priorities, amongst others

Excellencies, this is why the Urban Forum for Africa, matters; is not merely a gathering.

It is the continental platform where we anchor our common position, share our best practices, and strengthen partnerships that will shape Africa's urban future.

The UN Habitat has demonstrated a strong, multi-faceted commitment to the Addis Ababa Declaration, we confirm same commitment to supporting the actions of the Nairobi Declaration.

Our role is integral, we express that the first action for the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration, should be carried by this collective voice to the 13th World Urban Forum in Azerbaijan. We will arrive in Baku, not with a fragmented approach, but with unity and clarity that this Forum represents.

Let me close with this:

Africa's urban transition is one of the most important development opportunities of our time.

If managed well, it can lift millions of people out of poverty, drive economic transformation, and build resilience in the face of climate change.

However, if complacent, we risk deepening inequalities and vulnerabilities.

The distinguishing factor will come down to the coherence of decisions we formulate as a collective.

UN-Habitat stands firm and ready to work with all of you, from governments, cities, partners, and communities, to ensure that Africa's cities become engines of opportunity and resilience.

I look forward to robust debates and in-depth discussions ahead and importantly to seeing Africa's strong voice leading to WUF 13 , Baku, Azerbaijan and beyond.

Thank you. "Asanteni Sana".