



UN-HABITAT

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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

## **Opening Remarks by Ms. Anaclaudia Rossbach, Executive Director and Under-Secretary-General, UN-Habitat Thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13), Opening Ceremony, 18 May 2026**

His Excellency Dr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,

Her Excellency Ms. Annalena Baerbock, President of the United Nations General Assembly,

His Excellency, Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations.

His Excellency Mr. Nga Kor Ming, President of the United Nations Habitat Assembly and Minister for Housing and Local Government, Malaysia,

Excellencies,

Heads of State and Governments present,

Ministers, Honourable Representatives of Member States and Local Authorities;

Distinguished colleagues and guests - all protocols observed:

We may not know what the future holds, but we do know the realities people face today: the climate crisis, displacement, conflict and destruction. Amid these challenges, over a billion people still live in precarious conditions, without reliable access to water, sanitation, electricity, decent work or education – trapped in poor health conditions where disease spreads and children suffer most.

This is the world where most people will soon live in cities.

Cities where many young people, older persons, migrants and newcomers cannot afford to live.

Cities where more people are pushed onto the streets and into informal settlements.

Cities increasingly divided between those who have and those who do not.

Excellencies and distinguished colleagues,

It is no surprise that tens of thousands of us – from communities around the globe to high-level leaders – are gathered here in Baku to address one critical question: how, in this era of uncertainty, instability and destruction, can adequate housing be made available to all?

Despite the intense rainfall and thunderstorms that have affected parts of Azerbaijan in recent days, we have come together here in Baku with resilience, determination and a shared sense of purpose.

The level of interest and participation in WUF13 has been truly exceptional. Never before has a Forum of this nature brought together such a vast and diverse global audience – reflecting the growing recognition that housing and sustainable urban development are central to our collective future.

So, let us remind ourselves that collectively, we are not starting from scratch.

Across all regions, housing is becoming a central policy priority linked to economic growth, social inclusion and climate resilience.

Across Africa, governments are advancing affordable housing, informal settlement upgrading and infrastructure investment.

In Asia and the Pacific, several countries are pursuing urban renewal, affordability and large-scale housing expansion.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, social housing and transit-oriented development are gaining momentum.

In the Middle East, housing is increasingly tied to economic diversification and demographic change, while in Europe and North America, governments are strengthening affordable housing, rent regulation and supply-focused reforms in response to growing urban pressures.

Friends, as the world turns its attention to housing, let us also remind ourselves of the common principles and perspectives we already share.

We recognize that the housing crisis is a crisis of equity, resilience and human rights, and that the future of our cities will be shaped not by exclusion, but by inclusion. Cities cannot thrive when housing systems fail.

We know that when people lose their homes, they lose far more than walls and roofs – they lose safety, livelihoods and a sense of belonging.

Recognizing that the right to housing is increasingly threatened by climate change, we also share a growing consensus that climate action and housing policy can no longer exist in separate conversations. Recovery begins with housing, and resilience begins at home. The homes we build today must withstand the climate realities of tomorrow.

We therefore share the conviction that housing must move from the margins of policy to the centre of global action.

As we explore the economic and financial dimensions of housing, we collectively recognize that housing is a social necessity and also a powerful economic engine. Realizing the social and economic potential of housing requires financial systems that finance homes, not speculation.

Excellencies, dear friends,

The midterm review of the New Urban Agenda has confirmed both the urgency of today's urban challenges and the enduring value of the commitments made in Quito. WUF13 is an opportunity to accelerate implementation through practical action, partnerships and investment.

It is time to focus on solutions. What are the pathways to achieving adequate housing for all? Where have we gone wrong, and what must we do differently to move forward?

Does UN-Habitat have the solution to the global housing crisis?

Do we have all the answers for the nearly three billion people living with inadequate housing?

For the more than one billion people living in slums and informal settlements? Or for the approximately 300 million people experiencing homelessness?

I will not pretend that we do.

But let me add this:

Every one of you, without exception, holds a piece of the answer. And that is precisely what this collective effort is seeking.

We do not take lightly the time, cost – and, dare I add, the climate impact – of gathering here together. It is both our responsibility and our privilege to listen, learn from one another's experiences and bring our knowledge together.

Baku must send a clear message to the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly this July: we must move from recognizing the housing crisis to advancing the achievement of the SDGs through concrete policies, investments and action.

My hope is that we leave Baku with renewed confidence that, despite today's global challenges, adequate housing can be within reach for all – without exception.

In closing, I would like to thank the Government of Azerbaijan for hosting the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum.

It is now my pleasure to officially declare the session open.

Thank you.