

PGA Remarks at the opening ceremony of the 13th session of World Urban Forum

Remarks by H.E. Annalena Baerbock

President of the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly at the opening ceremony of the 13th session of World Urban Forum

Monday, 18 May 2026

Baku, Azerbaijan

[Pre-Recorded]

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Affordable, safe and decent housing is a fundamental human right.

It is the foundation of dignity, health, security and opportunity.

Yet today, that foundation remains out of reach for far too many people, with more than 1.1 billion people still living in informal settlements or slums, and more than 300 million people homeless.

The consequences extend far beyond housing alone.

Without safe housing, health erodes, education is disrupted, insecurity deepens, inequality hardens, and communities become more vulnerable to climate shocks and disasters.

The thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum therefore comes at an important moment.

It provides an opportunity to strengthen action on the housing crisis while connecting that work to the broader challenge of sustainable urbanization.

The participation of 28,000 people at this Forum reflects both the depth of global engagement and the scale of the responsibility before us.

Let us be clear: there are no simple solutions to a crisis of this scale.

Building more houses is necessary, but it will not be enough on its own.

What is required is a systematic approach that connects housing with infrastructure, basic services, climate resilience, financing and inclusive planning.

Such an approach also depends on broad participation, because sustainable urban development cannot be delivered by governments alone.

It requires local authorities, communities, civil society, the private sector, experts and residents themselves to help shape the cities in which they live.

Indeed, people should therefore be treated not only as beneficiaries of development, but also as active contributors to it.

In this regard, the New Urban Agenda remains our shared blueprint.

Its emphasis on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities is as relevant today as it was when it was adopted ten years ago.

This anniversary offers an important opportunity to assess where progress has been made, where gaps remain, and how implementation can be accelerated.

In July, the General Assembly will convene a two-day high-level meeting for the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda.

That meeting will provide an important opportunity to renew political commitment and strengthen implementation.

I trust that your deliberations at the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum will be meaningful, inclusive and practical, and that they will help inform negotiations on the political declaration in New York.

I wish you a successful Forum and look forward to welcoming many of you to New York in July.

Thank you.

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