



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13) opens in Baku

Baku, 18 May 2026 – The thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13) – the United Nations’ premier global conference on sustainable urban development – opened today in Baku, Azerbaijan, bringing together governments, local authorities, international organizations, businesses, academics and civil society to advance solutions for the future of cities and communities worldwide.

The Forum – the largest to date, attracting over 21,000 participants from 162 countries on the first day – is convened by UN-Habitat and co-organized with the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan under the theme “Housing the world: Safe and resilient cities and communities.”

WUF13 takes place at a defining moment for cities. Nearly 3 billion people globally are living in conditions of housing inadequacy, more than one billion people live in informal settlements and slums, and over 300 million people face homelessness. Against this backdrop, the Forum focuses on accelerating integrated urban solutions that connect housing with land, infrastructure, basic services, climate action, mobility and economic opportunity.

In a recorded video address, **António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations**, said: “Now is the time to put housing at the centre of sustainable development – by expanding access to housing that is adequate, safe and affordable, transforming informal settlements and slums, and addressing inequalities that inflame social tensions. Housing is a human right, and fundamental for human dignity. Let this World Urban Forum be a catalyst to make it a shared reality.”

Opening the Forum, **Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat**, stated: “Housing must move from the margins of policy to the centre of global action.”

She added: “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.”

Hosted in Baku, WUF13 reflects Azerbaijan’s growing role in fostering international cooperation and dialogue on sustainable urban development.

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In his opening remarks, **Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan**, said that first-time visitors to Azerbaijan would have the opportunity to witness the country's urban development efforts firsthand, highlighting Baku's transformation from one of the world's earliest oil-producing cities to the development of the White City project as a model of urban development.

"[The thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum] provides an opportunity to strengthen action on the housing crisis while connecting that work to the broader challenge of sustainable urbanization," said **Annalena Baerbock, President of the United Nations General Assembly**, in a recorded message. "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 10 years ago."

Message and support from global leaders

The opening ceremony brought together heads of state and government, ministers, mayors and senior representatives from across the international community, reflecting the growing political momentum around sustainable urbanization and housing. They are joined throughout the Forum by representatives of international organizations, financial institutions, academia, civil society and grassroots organizations.

Diverse participation, unified vision

WUF13 also reflects strong global participation across sectors and regions, reinforcing the Forum's role as the leading global platform for dialogue and action on sustainable urban development. Participants from Asia account for 89.7 per cent of registrations, followed by Africa at 5.6 per cent, Europe at 3.4 per cent, the Americas at 1.1 per cent and Oceania at 0.1 per cent. The Forum reflects a strong commitment to gender balance among speakers, with women representing 56 per cent and men 44 per cent of invited speakers.

A dynamic programme to drive action

The WUF13 programme includes six high-level dialogues, more than 370 partner-led events, and a global Urban Expo featuring over 130 exhibitors showcasing urban innovations, housing solutions, climate resilience initiatives and sustainable technologies.

New initiatives introduced at WUF13 include the Practices Hub, the WUF Academy and the Business & Innovation Hub with its Startup Pavilion – designed to accelerate learning, strengthen capacity-building and support scalable urban solutions.

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Key highlights of the programme include:

- **A ministerial dialogue** focused on accelerating implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11.
- **The launch of UN-Habitat's flagship World Cities Report**, examining the state and future of housing.
- **High-level dialogues** exploring housing, climate resilience, urban finance, local governance and innovation.
- **The Urban Expo**, featuring interactive exhibitions and solutions from governments, cities, academia, the private sector and civil society.
- **Networking, training and capacity-building opportunities** through the WUF Academy and other learning platforms.

From dialogue to delivery

Across the world, cities are already leading responses to climate change, housing shortages, inequality and rapid urbanization. WUF13 aims to help scale these solutions through stronger partnerships, political commitment and practical cooperation.

The Forum emphasizes the importance of empowering local governments and communities, recognizing that many transformative urban solutions are already being developed and implemented at the local level.

The Forum will conclude with the adoption of the Baku Call to Action, outlining shared commitments to accelerate progress towards inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities and communities.

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About the World Urban Forum

Established in 2001 by the United Nations, the World Urban Forum is the premier global conference on sustainable urbanization, designed to examine the impacts of rapid urbanization on cities, communities, economies, and climate change. Since its inception, WUF has been hosted in cities across the world, with the first session held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2002.

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**WORLD
URBAN
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THIRTEENTH SESSION



About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat is the United Nations entity responsible for sustainable urbanization. It has programmes in over 90 countries supporting policymakers and communities to create socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns. UN-Habitat promotes transformative change in cities 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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