

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT THIRTEENTH SESSION OF THE WORLD
URBAN FORUM (WUF 13)**

CLOSING CEREMONY

Friday, 22 May 2026

H.E. Mr. Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture of Azerbaijan,

H.E. Victoria Romero, Ambassador of Mexico to Azerbaijan,

Ms. Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat,

Representatives of Local and Regional Governments, Youth, Civil Society, Private Sector, and Academia,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be with you as we bring this Forum to a close.

I extend my gratitude to the Government and people of Azerbaijan for their extraordinary generosity and leadership in hosting the 13th World Urban Forum here in Baku.

By declaring 2026 the “Year of Urban Planning and Architecture”, Azerbaijan has elevated urbanism to the global stage—honoring centuries-old traditions while advancing progressive approaches to meet new challenges.

Across Azerbaijan we see reconstruction and development, reintegrating communities, rebuilding infrastructure, and transforming territories into engines of cultural vitality, social cohesion, and economic growth.

Here in Baku, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities, we have also witnessed renewal and resilience.

This has been a fitting place for this week's discussions, as climate change and urban pressures are driving ever more frequent and intense impacts worldwide.

The heavy rain and thunderstorms that struck Azerbaijan in recent days are a stark reminder of the resilience, determination and unity we must summon to counter these new realities.

I wish to also express my deepest thanks to the staff from Azerbaijan, UN-Habitat and across the UN system for their unwavering dedication and professionalism, which has been instrumental in the success of this Forum.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, when most of humanity is urban, I have come to think of cities as the architecture of priorities, designing with people at the center.

They show what we choose to build, how we choose to build it, and who we choose to build it for.

Our shared future is, for the most part, a story about territorial planning. And at its heart, it is a story about housing.

Home is where dignity begins.

It is the essential starting point for healthy, safe, dignified, and productive lives.

Yet the global housing crisis we have heard described this week is enormous in scope and human cost, and we know why.

Because of rapid urbanisation.

Because of conflicts, more of which are taking place now than at any point since World War Two.

Because of the deep inequality and injustice that has been allowed to continue.

Because of the climate we have changed and are still changing.

Wind storms, fire and flooding are impacting people worldwide, devastating infrastructure and the economy, and underscoring the urgent need for resilient territorial planning.

With predictions of the 2026 El Nino, every investment must turn into long-term resilience and preparedness.

This requires robust insurance systems that protect livelihoods, strengthen infrastructure, and reduce

vulnerability, ensuring communities are safeguarded against future disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no pathway to achieving the 2030 Agenda without sustainable urbanization and adequate housing.

Draw every great challenge of our time on a page, and housing is the point at which they all converge.

Adequate housing leads to clean water and sanitation. Energy to cook a meal, or heat and light a room. It's about affordability. Safety. Security of tenure.

Enable these, and you secure health, education, poverty eradication, gender equality, climate resilience and social inclusion.

This week we have spoken of housing as a development issue.

An economic issue.

And fundamentally, a human rights issue.

Housing is an accelerator to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

And despite the crisis in housing, this week, we have heard of remarkable progress in integrating urban and rural planning with the SDG framework as a guide.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Meeting a crisis of this scale requires cooperation at every level.

And we meet at a hard moment for multilateralism.

The values and principles of the UN Charter are being undermined.

Tensions are sharper and trust is disappearing.

Division is gaining pace.

Yet we have seen this week that cooperation is the only thing that has ever worked on challenges this monumental.

And one of the most powerful forms of cooperation right now is happening at the local and regional levels.

In mayors' offices.

In neighbourhood associations.

In partnerships between local and regional governments, civil society, the private sector, young people, women's groups, and the communities themselves.

Local governments are the ones answering the phone when the storm hits.

They are the ones delivering water, transport, housing, and decent work.

They are the ones maintaining the social contract, and rebuilding trust between people and institutions.

Recognizing this, the United Nations is placing engagement with local and regional governments at the centre of UN reform. This is reflected in the Secretary-General's 2025 report on recommendations to enhance the engagement of local and regional governments.

A central role in this effort is being addressed through the mid-term review of the New Urban Agenda.

In addition, the Local2030 Coalition: the United Nations system-wide platform for localizing the 2030 Agenda is working with UN Country Teams in accelerating localization in countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past days, close to 50,000 participants from 176 countries have come together in Baku and virtually for one reason: to design decent, resilient and interconnected futures across urban-rural territories with people at the core.

We must use the remaining window to 2030 to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 11 and the commitment to adequate housing for all.

From upgrading informal settlements and expanding green mobility to reclaiming public spaces and improving air quality — because the window for transformative action is narrowing rapidly.

Accelerating this work requires financing, investment and scalable pipelines capable of building, recovering and reimagining the future of our cities.

The Ministerial Meeting on the New Urban Agenda held here this week has sent a strong signal of renewed political commitment.

Now, as we look ahead, the discussions here in Baku lay the foundation for July.

The High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Midterm Review of the New Urban Agenda, alongside the

SDG 11 review at the High-Level Political Forum, is the moment to put the housing crisis where it belongs: at the centre of the global conversation.

So, we are leaving Baku with a clear message:

The next decade of the New Urban Agenda cannot look like the last one.

We need more ambition.

More financing.

More climate action and resilience.

More cooperation across every level of government.

More political urgency.

And less patience for the gap between what we promise and what we deliver.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cities are humanity's oldest collective project.

Our mission now is to carry that project forward so that the cities we shape in this century are cities that include everyone, house everyone, and leave no one behind.

Our generation is not the first to take it on.

We will not be the last.

**But we may be the first with the knowledge, the tools,
and the partnerships to meet it fully.**

**So, take what we have learned and built here in Baku
and carry it into your ministries, your city halls, your
communities, your boardrooms.**

**Carry that determination forward to New York in July,
and from there, into every town or city that someone calls
home.**

Thank you.
