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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

PRESS RELEASE

World Cities Day 2026 puts housing at the heart of urban regeneration

Fuzhou, China, 31 October 2026 – How cities renew existing urban areas while ensuring that such regeneration also benefits the people who already live there was the focus of this year's World Cities Day, observed today in the city of Fuzhou in southeastern China.

"Regeneration has always been part of how a city stays alive. But regeneration isn't about replacing the old with the new. It's about whether people's lives get better," said the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Anacláudia Rossbach.

"More than a billion of us still call informal settlements and slums home, while many more strain under the cost of housing, weak services, and the mounting force of a changing climate," she added. "Our task is not to reinvent. It is to listen, learn, invest in the work that works – and put the people who live in these places at the heart of the decisions."

Ms. Rossbach was one of many attendees at the observance held in the capital of Fujian Province under the theme 'Regenerating the City: Adequate Housing for All.'

It brought together a wide range of government leaders and urban stakeholders to explore how cities use regeneration to improve living conditions, address housing needs and create more inclusive, resilient and sustainable communities.

"Urban renewal must never be reduced to a gentrification process that displaces the vulnerable. A true urban transformation must be unreservedly people-centred... No one – no family, no child, no elder – should be left behind in this process," said the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly, Malaysia's Minister of Housing and Local Government, Nga Kor Ming.

In his message for the occasion, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: "Urban regeneration offers a path forward," noting how revitalizing existing urban areas can

create more housing, upgrade infrastructure and improve public spaces, making cities more resilient, inclusive and connected.

“Achieving this vision requires planning and partnership,” he continued. “National and local governments, financial institutions, the private sector and communities must work together to build cities that meet the needs of all residents... I urge cities everywhere to invest in regeneration and adequate housing for all.”

Growing pressures

The challenge with urban regeneration benefitting all residents is immense. Up to 3.4 billion people worldwide experience some form of housing inadequacy, including more than 1.1 billion living in informal settlements and slums. At the same time, ageing neighbourhoods and infrastructure, rising housing costs and intensifying climate risks put additional pressure on cities.

Regeneration can help make better use of existing urban areas, but without safeguards for affordability and residents’ rights, improvements can also leave people struggling to remain in their own neighbourhoods.

In its most recent *World Cities Report*, UN-Habitat highlights adequate housing as a fundamental pillar of sustainable urban development and human well-being, extending far beyond the provision of shelter.

The report goes on to note how housing influences access to employment, public services, health, and economic opportunity, making it central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet adopted by all UN Member States in 2015.

Discussions and exchanges

The observance in Fuzhou included a high-level discussion by ministers responsible for housing, urban development and public works, as well as senior UN officials such as the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, to explore advances and approaches to housing and urban development.

The exchange connected the global challenge of adequate housing with the policies and decisions needed to shape cities and improve conditions for their residents.

The wider programme, running from 31 October to 2 November at the Fuzhou Strait International Conference and Exhibition Center, includes thematic sessions, side

events, exhibitions and city tours, creating opportunities for participants to exchange experiences and explore approaches to sustainable urban development.

Today's opening ceremony also featured the fourth-cycle Global Award for Sustainable Development in Cities, known as the Shanghai Award. Established by UN-Habitat and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government, the award promotes the localization of the SDGs, particularly SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and recognizes cities' progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda. This year's winning cities were Katowice, Poland; Jingdezhen, China; Istanbul, Türkiye; Santiago de Cali, Colombia; and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

World Cities Day concluded UN-Habitat's Urban October, an annual month-long campaign to promote sustainable urbanization, address urban challenges, and share ideas for better cities. It formally began with World Habitat Day in Muscat, Oman, on 5 October. The two observances shared a focus on adequate housing, underlining its importance both to the future of cities and to the everyday lives of the people who call them home.

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About World Cities Day

Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013 and first celebrated in 2014, World Cities Day is observed annually on 31 October to promote international cooperation on sustainable urban development.

About UN- Habitat

UN-Habitat is the United Nations entity working for sustainable urbanization. With programmes in over 90 countries, it supports policymakers and communities to create socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns. UN-Habitat promotes transformative change in urban areas through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance, and collaborative action. To know more, visit unhabitat.org or follow us on X @UNHABITAT.

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