Malaysian Urban Forum 2019

Mayors, Local and Regional Government Assembly

Opening Speech

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Honourable YB Zuraida Kamaruddin, Minister of Housing & Local Government

Honourable Datuk Nor Hisham Ahmad Dahlan, Mayor of Kuala Lumpur

Honourable Mayors

Honourable Members of the Local and Regional Assemblies

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you for this important gathering.

I am further delighted to be with you, my friends and former colleagues.

Before I start, I would like to wish all of you and your families a Happy New Year! May this year bring us a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world!

We are meeting this morning under the auspices of the Malaysian Urban Forum. I would like to thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to speak at this morning's assembly, which is close to my heart.

Honourable Ministers and Mayors, ladies and gentlemen,

As most of you know, I was once a mayor myself and I am very happy to see so many former colleagues here today. As anyone of them can tell you, life in local government is all about action. We live an action-oriented lifestyle and we are expected to solve issues on the ground every minute of every day. I hope we all agree to bring the same sense of urgency and focus as we discuss, debate and share our knowledge on how to improve living conditions in Malaysian cities. For the United Nations system in general and UN-Habitat in particular, this Malaysian Urban Forum is a great opportunity to learn from your experiences, as we are constantly looking for innovative urban solutions to enrich our work.

The theme of this morning's assembly is all about action: "***Dynamic cities and urban governance***".

It compels us to think forward.

It compels us to move forward.

It compels us to be innovative in the way we think about our cities, as dynamic administrative centers.

For this reasons, my dear friends, allow me to share two messages with you.

First, why dynamic cities?

Because **the battle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be won or lost in cities**.

Because the majority of the people in the world live in cities. It is their aspirations, drive and needs which make cities dynamic places, centres of political and economic decision-making. These aspirations cover a wide spectrum of human dignity and human rights such as addressing poverty in all of its forms, combating socioeconomic inequalities, slums and informal settlements and high unemployment rates, tackling discrimination, social exclusion and marginalization, including based on gender or disabilities, and effective preventing and responding to humanitarian crises, conflicts, pollution, climate change, to name but a few.

Dynamic cities are able to embrace these aspirations. Their capacity to welcome rapid change determines their dynamism.

You may be wondering what the ingredients of a dynamic city are.

Honourable Ministers and Mayors, ladies and gentlemen,

The capacity to attract investment and innovation, and the ability to harness the power of disruptive technology, as well as ensuring inspiration, and inclusion, particularly for women, children, youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities, and people on the move, such as refugees, while enabling interconnection and infrastructure are some of the basic ingredients.

As mayors and city leaders, you know as well as I do, that cities that perform well do not happen by accident. They need and they have these ingredients.

Honourable Ministers and Mayors, ladies and gentlemen,

As your cities are transforming into dynamic centres, UN-Habitat is ready to support you in developing integrated and holistic policies and plans, strengthening governance and capacities of institutions, promoting sustainable financing mechanisms, collecting data, establishing baselines and setting up monitoring systems to inform decision-making, and formulating bankable projects, **wherever you are**! We believe in a better quality of life in an urbanizing world, and we believe that we can achieve this, together.

My second message, as you can imagine, is about urban governance. **Why is it such an important element in the transformation and dynamism of cities?**

Because weak institutions and poor governance mechanisms increase the risk of low performance, waste of resources, inefficient sectoral interventions, human rights violations and overall lack of progress.

Proper institutions and governance mechanisms, together, determine how people, organizations and the private sector make economic, social and political decisions, maximizing potentials and optimizing resources.

Urban governance encompasses the different ways by which public and private institutions and individuals participate in the planning, design and management of the common affairs of the city, and the processes used for effectively realizing the short- and long-term agenda of a city's development. Urban governance can deliver sustainable development when it is environmentally-friendly, participatory, accountable, transparent, effective, equitable and inclusive, both in law and in practice.

Honourable Ministers and Mayors, ladies and gentlemen,

Thanks to my background as a former mayor, the challenges and opportunities that decision-makers at a city-level face on a daily basis are very familiar to me, as is the importance of the work of a mayor in the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals**. I understand you. I am one of you. I am with you, and so is my team at UN-Habitat.**

UN-Habitat recognizes the multiplicity of national, regional and local governmental agencies and organizations with competing interests and influence. Improving urban governance requires that the institutional framework is coordinated and transparent.

UN-Habitat is always ready to work with you towards strengthening urban governance, with sound institutions and mechanisms that empower and include

representatives of urban stakeholders and constituencies, as well as appropriate checks and balances, providing predictability and coherence in urban development plans to enable inclusive and sustainable economic growth and environmental protection.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the organizers for the usual Malaysian hospitality extended to me and my team, it has become legendary among my colleagues.

I also applaud the organizers for choosing compelling themes for the forum and this morning assembly.

And as much as I love my work that takes me all over the world, it is good to be home, and here with you. Together, we can create a better quality of life for all. Let's start right now.

I thank you for your attention!