Third National Urban Forum, Rwanda: "Implementing the New Urban Agenda" Opening Ceremony Remarks

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Honourable Minister Claver Gatete, Minister for Infrastructure
Honourable Mayor Rwakazina, Mayor of Kigali
UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Fodé Ndiaye
Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, UN Colleagues, Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen
All protocol observed

Mwaramutse!
Bonjour!
Habari za asubuhi!
A very good morning to you all!

I would like to start by expressing my appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Rwanda for organizing this Forum, and to His Excellency, President Paul Kagame for his patronage. President Kagame has been a steadfast promoter of sustainable urban development in Rwanda, and across Africa in his role as Chair of the African Union, through his deep-seated commitment to the achievement of Agenda 2063 and to the Harmonized Regional Framework for the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda in Africa. His robust vision for transforming Rwanda into an innovative, united, democratic and prosperous leading country in the region, with sustainable urban development as its driving force, serves as an inspiration throughout the continent and beyond.

On behalf of UN-Habitat, I would like to thank the city of Kigali and Mayor Rwakazina for hosting this Forum. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to Honourable Minister Gatete and his team for organizing this event, the largest urban event of the country, which brings together all key players working on the urban agenda in Rwanda, and which strongly builds on the successful outcomes of the previous two National Urban Forums.

Honourable Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank you for the warm welcome and kind hospitality extended to my team and me. It is indeed a pleasure to be here with you in Kigali, on my first official visit as Executive Director of UN-Habitat. We are extremely proud and honoured to co-organize this Forum with you.

Today, I would like to share with you three key messages:

First, in UN-Habitat we are aware that Rwanda has an impressive wealth of expertly designed strategies and plans to guide sustainable urbanization to build on and ensure that you get your cities right. Since the second session of the National Urban Forum in 2011, Rwanda has come a long way to maximize the benefits of inclusive urbanization while avoiding the pitfalls of unplanned urbanization. Notably, in the 1st National Strategy for Transformation of Rwanda, which sets out the ambition of becoming a low middle-income country by 2024, a middle-income country by 2035 and a high-income country by 2050, urbanization is referred to as one of the main enablers to achieve such transformation. I commend your vision and efforts. As the focal point for sustainable urbanization in the United Nations system, we are delighted to note that Rwanda has also formulated the Urbanization and Rural Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2024. Moreover, in 2015 the Government of Rwanda adopted the National Urbanization Policy, which is centred on the four pillars of **(i)** coordination, **(ii)** densification, **(iii)** conviviality and **(iv)** economic growth.

The foundations are well in place, and now it is time to translate the plans, strategies and policies into concrete deliverables, as you strive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 11 on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

My second point is about the central significance of partnerships and collaboration. This forum provides a unique platform for a wide range of actors to understand, discuss and agree on practical ways to strengthen the urbanization process and to implement the New Urban Agenda in Rwanda. Currently, more and more

development partners are willing to come on board to share ideas and invest resources in the urbanization process that the Government of Rwanda is spearheading. It is clear that Rwanda is on a promising trajectory, and on a clear path towards inclusive and participatory urban development. This forum provides an unprecedented opportunity for partners in urban development coming with diverse experiences, roles and expertise to take stock of past achievements, current initiatives and future opportunities to forge a path towards holistic and collaborative implementation.

At the same time, we know the clock is ticking. Urbanization is one of the global mega-trends of our time, unstoppable and irreversible. In 30 years, two-thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas. Ninety per cent of urban growth will occur in less developed regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Rwanda has the highest population density in Africa, with urbanisation increasing at 4.4% per year.

Furthermore, in UN-Habitat, we have established that urbanization in Africa is largely unplanned, fueling the continuous growth of informal or slum settlements, which currently accommodate close to 1 billion people in developing countries, and are the physical manifestation of urban poverty and inequality. Today, 1.6 billion people globally live in inadequate housing and often do not have security of tenure. Young people remain three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, and discrimination against women remains pervasive.

Such challenges and obstacles drive home a cardinal point for all of us: the 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved by Governments alone. To address the needs of the most vulnerable in communities around the world, in Africa and in Rwanda, including women, children, youth, older persons and people with disability, we need a bolder and more inclusive approach to partnership by bringing together civil society, businesses, international bodies, organizations of faith, and individuals, among other actors.

To achieve the SDGs, we will have to collectively unlock the power of partnerships.

To achieve the SDGs, we will have to work better together.

The United Nations, in general, and UN-Habitat, in particular, has a critical role to play in bringing all stakeholders together.

Finally, we are all in this together. UN-Habitat is committed to working with our partners in Rwanda to improve the sustainability, preparedness and resilience of all its cities and all human settlements. We have been working in Rwanda since 1994 through post-genocide reconstruction, and opened our Country Office in Kigali in July 2004, which has since played an active role in aligning UN-Habitat's contributions with Government strategies, specifically through promoting sustainable urbanisation. Since 2008, jointly with our local partners and under the "Delivering as One UN" framework, we have implemented several projects, including supporting the preparation and implementation of the National Urbanization Policy, the City-wide Informal Settlements Upgrading Strategy for Kigali, the Green City Toolkit and the National Master Plan for Smart Cities.

Honourable Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In UN-Habitat, we are undergoing a profound transformation process as well, including through the formulation of our strategic plan 2020-2025, which recalibrates our focus and positioning as a centre of excellence and innovation on sustainable urbanization issues. Our new vision is "***A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world***".

UN-Habitat's main goals for the period 2020-2025 are:

- To reduce spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban - rural continuum;
- To enhance shared prosperity of cities and regions;
- To strengthen climate action and improved urban environment; and
- To support effective urban crisis prevention and response.

In the context of our new strategic plan, our ongoing ambition is to strengthen our presence and our partnerships to better support central and local authorities in implementing the New Urban Agenda, and to showcase the successes of Rwanda and the productive outcomes of our partnership regionally, to facilitate cross-country

learning and collaboration. In this regard, UN-Habitat stands ready to work hand-in-hand with the Government of Rwanda:

- to develop holistic and integrated policies and plans, given that leveraging the benefits of sustainable urbanization, while also managing related social, economic, governance and environmental challenges, requires the harmonization of policies across sectors and between cities, and integrating the global agenda into the national strategies;
- to increase access to basic and social services, sustainable mobility and public space;
- to increase access to land and adequate and affordable housing;
- to increase access to decent jobs and livelihoods for youth and women in urban centers;
- to foster smart solutions and innovations for urban development;
- to improve resource efficiency and sustainable waste management;
- to enhance social integration and inclusive communities; and
- to enhance resilience of the built environment and infrastructure.

We are with you!

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all partners that contributed to the successful organization of this event.

And, I would like to close with sincere congratulations to His Excellency President Kagame, the Government of the Republic of Rwanda, and the Ministry of Infrastructure of Rwanda and other co-organisers of this Forum.

Thank you for inviting me to this special event. I very much look forward to informative and productive discussions.

Thank you for your attention!
Murakoze!
Merci!
Asante sana!