Fourth United Nations Environment Assembly, Cities Summit
Innovation for Liveable and Sustainable Cities:
Multi-Level and Integrated Urban Systems

Opening Remarks by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat
Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif

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Honourable Ministers and Mayors, Excellencies
Acting Executive Director, Ms. Joyce Msuya
Distinguished Delegates of the Cities Summit
Ladies and Gentlemen
All protocol observed

A very good morning to you all. Habari zu asubuhi!

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to jointly open this very first Cities Summit, taking place during the fourth United Nations Environment Assembly, together with the Acting Executive Director of UN Environment, Ms. Joyce Msuya.

UN Environment and UN-Habitat have a long history of working together, specifically to improve urban environmental conditions globally and tackle the multiple challenges of our world's cities in the areas of climate change, sustainable urban infrastructure provision, environmental protection, resource-efficiency, and increasing urban resilience. The Greener Cities Partnership serves as the main knowledge exchange and coordination platform to transform cities into sustainable entities that can provide equal access to natural resources while reducing their impact on the environment.

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

One: let us recognize the role that cities play to improve the greater sustainability of our planet.

Approximately 55% of the global population today is urban, and this will only continue to increase. By 2050, some 68% of the world's citizens will be living in urban settings. That is around 2.5 billion people in cities. Most of this growth will take place in Asia and Africa.

This is an immense challenge, not only for mayors and local governments, but also for national governments. When we talk of urbanization, we must see it as a part of a whole, whether that whole is defined as part of a region, a country, a continent, or Planet Earth. Rivers flow not only through one city, they cross regional and often national boundaries. The lifestyle choices of a city's inhabitants affect our natural environment and impact climate change. On a more positive tone, a city's prosperity can raise the economy of a region or country. Rethinking our current urban governance models and developing integrated, holistic and integrated urban development and planning mechanisms, ensuring vertical and horizontal solutions, is crucial to having more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive cities – leaving no one and no place behind.

This is a concept outlined in the New Urban Agenda. The New Urban Agenda, a global framework that was adopted by United Nations Member States in 2016, lays out how cities should be planned and managed make them sustainable, even as they grow. Using this framework, we can envisage a socially just, low-carbon, and resource-efficient urban future.

The community of practitioners here with us today represents stakeholders at all levels, including policy-makers and practitioners who are passionate about sustainable and resilient cities. How great would it be if we could end this Summit today with tangible results, which can be the basis of further discussion, and action, at upcoming international events: first, at the International Conference on Climate Action in May, then at the Secretary-General's Climate Summit in September, at COP 25 and the Tenth World

Urban Forum that will be held in Abu Dhabi in February 2020. The Cities Summit should not be a stand-alone event. Instead, this Summit could be the catalyst for a series of decisive actions, each building on the other, toward the ultimate goal of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11, to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

My second point is to reiterate the theme of UNEA 4: "Innovative Solutions to Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production" which is directly linked to the theme of this Summit: "Innovation for Liveable and Sustainable Cities: Multi-Level and Integrated Urban Systems." UN-Habitat has developed innovative solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing urban centres today. It is not enough to work hard to meet environmental challenges, we must work smart.

By testing mixed reality technology, we can use the virtual world laid out over real urban spaces, to public space design democratic and inclusive. In Kenya and South Africa, UN-Habitat and UN Environment have worked on green public space design, allowing young people, old people, wealthy and poor to take part in these interactive processes. Inclusivity means a greater acceptance of the final product.

Air quality sensors assess the level of pollution of cities in Africa and Asia. Together with UN Environment and Ericsson, we have worked with local governments and public transport entities to monitor air pollution and raise awareness on this issue. Artists have then helped visualize the level of air pollution, and through their work we have created showcases at a "public space festivals" where citizens were able to "walk through" the pollution particles that were highlighted in colours.

But innovation is not the same thing as high-tech. Innovation means changing our way of thinking, to increase the impact of our work. We should by all means use the technologies available to us, as tools to help us improve our

impact. Sometimes, however, a low-tech solution can be more effective. When UN-Habitat and UNHCR re-looked at the refugee camps in Kalobyei in 2016, we began a project to shift the camps there from an emergency focus to a vision of longer term, incremental development, keeping in mind the host communities and the various ethnic groups. In Kalobyei, we have worked closely with national and county government and embraced a participatory approach, using donor funds to attract public and private investment in the region. I encourage the participants of this Summit today to re-think some of our established systems and processes, and consider how, by looking at a situation from a different perspective, and by soliciting and listening to the views of others, we can better innovate for liveable and sustainable cities.

My third message is to reiterate UN-Habitat's commitment to a sustainable and resilient urban future. We are committed to improving the sustainability, preparedness and resilience of cities and all human settlements, to complement the work of UN Environment as we work jointly on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the context of the UN Environment Assembly, this means we must protect, conserve and restore urban ecosystems, including waterbodies, in the best way possible. We must pay attention to the infrastructure of our cities, which continue to emit most of the global greenhouse gases and produce the highest amounts of waste.

UN-Habitat has recently completed its new Strategic Plan for 2020-2025, which will be formally presented at our inaugural UN-Habitat Assembly in May. This Plan clearly lays out the interlinkages between the environment, prosperity and innovation, human settlements, inequality and disaster response. One of the four Domains of Change is "**Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment**". We have three outcome areas under this Domain of Change: **(1)** reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air

quality; **(2)** improving resource efficiency and protecting ecological assets, and; **(3)** adapting communities and infrastructure to climate change.

We begin implementing our new Strategic Plan in January 2020. This Cities Summit is therefore an opportunity for us, UN-Habitat, to reiterate our commitment to work with all of you, and to reaffirm the critical role that local and national governments play in tackling the global environmental challenges together. To get our cities right, and to make them liveable, while using the best that innovation has to offer, we must ensure the following: integrated planning and the integration of all urban systems; the availability and use of disaggregated date to inform planning; the coordination at all levels of governance; circular procurement models; the engagement of the private sector in the full cycle of their business models; access to sustainable financing and last but not least, full community engagement, ensuring the wellbeing and empowerment of even the most vulnerable of our societies.

I would like to close with sincere congratulations to UN Environment in organizing the first-ever Cities Summit at this year's Environment Assembly!

I wish you all a day of meaningful and enriching discussions and look forward to the outcomes.

Thank you. Asante sana!