‘Gender Equality in Cities’ Roundtable,
hosted by the European Commission, Brussels

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Thursday, 7 March 2019 at approx. 14:15, 5 minutes

Honourable Commissioner for Regional Policy, Ms. Corina Crețu

Deputy Director-General for Implementation - Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy (REGIO), Mr. Normunds Popens

Excellencies, Mayors, Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocol observed

On behalf of UN-Habitat, I wish to thank Commissioner Crețu and European Commission colleagues for inviting us here and convening this important discussion. My journey over the last year has been challenging but with the support and strong will of colleagues we have created change.

The 2019 URBACT (Urban Action) Report on Gender Equal Cities highlights important issues facing us, as we try to achieve gender equality in cities and beyond.

As you may imagine, many of the challenges highlighted in this report and in Europe, are even bigger challenges faced by many countries in other parts of the world.

As the UN organization mandated by the UN General Assembly, to promote socially and environmentally sustainable settlements, with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all, UN-Habitat works in developing cities that promote inclusion and equality for all, including gender. Throughout our work we mainstream gender, to ensure that all of our operational and normative work is contributing to the larger goal of achieving gender equality.

The URBACT Report highlights six key issues: representation, governance, economic equality, public services, planning and migration. To highlight a few global statistics:

- Women's perspectives and voices are significantly under-represented in urban leadership – women make up less than five percent of mayors worldwide. Being the first woman to hold the position of Mayor of Seberang Perai and the second woman to be Mayor of the City Council of Penang, Malaysia, I know that we have a long way to go in seeing more women in office at the mayor-level.
- According to current trends, the global gender pay gap will take 202 years to close.
- Globally, women spend twice as much time on unpaid housework and domestic chores as men – which decreases their time available for paid work.
- In 40% of the countries surveyed for the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report, women do not have equal access to financial services as men, and in 58% of the countries surveyed women do not enjoy the same land ownership rights as men.

Tomorrow, 8 March, is officially International Women's Day. The theme is 'Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change.' At UN-Habitat we follow this principle every day because we believe in people, women, men, girls and boys, and that cities which the place where people live, work, play and school, should embrace gender equality. As cities which plan for women, plan for all.

Today I will focus on planning cities with, and for, women.

Historically cities around the world have been predominantly planned by men, which has meant that the unique needs and circumstances of women have tended to be ignored.

As the Report highlights, urban planning is a male dominated profession. However, gender-sensitive urban planning requires more than simply increasing women's participation – research shows that women and men experience and use the urban environment in different ways and have different priorities when it comes to municipal services and infrastructure.

Indeed, gender-sensitive and gender-transformative urban planning requires planners, designers, decision-makers and community members looking at problems with the needs of both men and women, as well as other marginalised groups, in mind. This is in line with SDG 11, and will ensure that cities are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. As cities are the hubs of growth, we have to plan them right by having integrated and holistic sustainable development plans, which plan for all and incorporate the expected outcomes of SDG 5 – Gender Equality.

UN-Habitat's work aims to combat some of the problems around gender-inequalities in cities. This includes planning, representation, housing and migration.

In 2008, in partnership with the European Commission, UN-Habitat also launched the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP). The programme operates in over 40 countries and its emphasis is on integrating slum dwellers into the broader urban fabric using city-wide participatory planning methods. Inclusiveness and gender mainstreaming are core concepts within the scope of this programme, ensuring that women, youth and other vulnerable groups are involved in the decision-making process. This method of involvement is called the "People Process."

This provides a positive practical experience of inclusive integrated slum upgrading through which all stakeholders learn key lessons and feel confident to adopt participatory planning in other upgrading and planning processes. This programme also contributes to our global work on fulfilling the right to adequate housing.

Also, at the global level, the "Safer Cities" Programme, which is a community-led, results-oriented programme enabling local authorities and women's, youth and children's advocates to take actions to increase safety, and prevent and reduce violence, and especially gender-based violence including sexual violence and harassment against women and girls.

At country level, in Afghanistan, UN-Habitat has developed Community Development Councils (CDCs) that operate in every province. These councils are gender-balanced, many with female Chairs, and provide an open forum for women to speak up and participate in decision making. These Councils have proven a strong platform for inclusivity, building trust and community cohesion. Through the Community Development Councils women have played a key role in peacebuilding in the country.

We are also expanding our work on migration, as migrants are predominantly settling in cities and are predominantly women and children. In the Mediterranean we have the City-to-City Migration project, funded by the European Commission and implemented by UN-Habitat, the International Centre for Migration Policy and the United Cities and Local Governments. The project contributes to improved rights-based migration governance in cities. UN-Habitat has been implementing this project over the last three years, bringing in technical expertise on access to housing, prevention of discrimination, and transition shelter strategies within local governance contexts.

Finally, I would like to speak about UN-Habitat's new Strategic Plan 2020-2025, which places gender equality as one of the crosscutting issues (others are human rights, youth, children, older persons and people living with disabilities) ensuring that all our normative and operational work contributes to the gradual achievement of gender equality. This will be achieved using various Drivers of Change, one of which is specifically on urban planning and design effectively reducing poverty on the rural-urban continuum. I believe this dynamic new Strategic Plan provides a crucial opportunity for us to work with one of UN-Habitat's key partners, the European Commission and other partners. I am open to all your proposals.

I thank you all for your time and interest, I look forward to continuing this discussion with all of you. It is only by working together can we truly put a human face on urbanisation and human settlements.

In closing**, I would like to wish you all a very Happy International Women's Day, particularly** to all the inspiring women in the room and in the world! **Think equal, build smart and innovate for change!**

Thank you.