Statement of the Executive Director
On the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March 2019

This International Women's Day we celebrate the female innovators, change-makers, and urban specialists, dedicating their lives to seeing the attainment of vital public services and equal ownership and housing rights for women and for all. This year's theme, **"Think equal, build smart, innovate for change"** is fully in line with UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda. The New Urban Agenda calls on cities to **"achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal rights in all fields and in leadership at all levels of decision-making…".**

UN-Habitat is mandated to promote sustainable urbanization. It is the growth of the urban population and the city alongside it that characterizes urbanization. Cities are not only made up of bricks and mortar, buildings and roads, but of *people*. People of all genders, all ages, all ethnicities and all religions. Cities are where families grow, where young women are educated and where ideas change. Cities are hubs of innovation and changing ideas. It is the people within cities that make them the vibrant places that they are.

However, across the globe, women are often marginalized where they cannot be heard, where they lack rights, and where they cannot access land ownership and tenure. Women suffer disproportionately where there is little or no safe and convenient public transportation, adequate and affordable housing, and, clean water and sanitation. These inequalities are among the most detrimental, as the needs for security are at the base of the pyramid. They are fundamental for any individual to feel safe, and if not met can lead women to feel unsafe, worried and uncomfortable in their environments which they should be able to call home.

As the global frontrunner in inclusive, participatory urbanization, UN-Habitat advocates for cities that provide equal opportunity for all residents – female or male, young or old, rich or poor, citizen, migrant or refugee. In our work, we often observe that women are traditionally "left behind" in governance, development and participatory processes. Through our programmes, we engage women in urban planning and governance. We listen to the voices of women, ask their priorities and help them to realize their rights.

As a cross-cutting issue, gender is integrated into all aspects of the work of UN-Habitat. Ensuring that women's needs, and voices are represented in all projects and decision-making, our Strategic Plan 2020-2025 identifies and commits UN-Habitat to ensuring that gender discrimination is eliminated, women's rights are upheld, and their needs are substantially addressed.

As the first female Asian woman to lead UN-Habitat and one of the two former female mayors of Penang, Malaysia, I am passionate about gender equality and women's empowerment. I know the strength and determination it takes to keep up the fight for gender equality. With this, I reiterate UN-Habitat's commitment to supporting local governments in creating inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities which provide a home for all: women, men, children, youth, the elderly, persons with disability and marginalized groups, ensuring we leave no one and no place behind.

More information:
Report on Gender Equity Assessment of Nairobi's Public Minibus Transport Services
Policy and Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Urban Development
Gender Equality Enhancer