Malaysian Urban Forum 2019

Opening Ceremony

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18 February 2019

Honourable YAB Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Deputy Prime Minister

Salutations _____

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Ladies and gentlemen,

This morning at the Mayors, Local and Regional Governments Assembly, I expressed my delight to be here.

To see even more familiar faces in the room, I cannot express in words how overwhelmed I am with joy.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the organizers of the Malaysian Urban Forum 2019 for partnering with UN-Habitat for this event.

Thank you Urbanice Malaysia and the Ministry of Housing & Local Government.

I would also like to congratulate you for choosing such an opportune theme for this MUF 2019: "***Towards a sustainable urban nation***".

Today, a year after Malaysia hosted the 9th World Urban Forum in this convention centre, I am happy to see the country coming together to discuss the theme of "sustainability" as an urban nation. This is important not only for Malaysia where 80% of the total population lives in towns and cities, but also for other countries in the region.

This morning at the Mayors assembly I said that the **battle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be won or lost in cities**. This is true globally, it is more so true for Malaysia.

For this reason, as we debate and engage in the course of these two days, I would like us to reflect on three essential points.

First, the need to be aware of the challenges of urbanization in Malaysia.

Urbanization in Malaysia during the last few decades has been characterized by the growth of metropolitan cities. The level of urbanization in the country is expected to reach about 80% by 2030, similar to the current level or urbanization in Canada and the United States. By the year 2030 Kuala Lumpur alone will have a population of almost 10 million. This rapid

urbanization growth is leading to adverse consequences. For example, in recent years, urban poverty in Malaysia has become an increasingly grave challenge.

Urban poverty in the country is also affected by the population migration from rural to urban areas as well as the natural population growth in urban centers. The significant increase of urban populations in a short span of time contributes to a high speed of urban expansion, leading to difficulties for local governments, especially around providing services and infrastructure, and creating job opportunities. If not planned well, this rapid urban growth can make economic, social and environmental problems worse. This is already clear with citizens grappling with issues such as affordability and availability of housing, land and green space, mobility and transport, sanitation and waste management, and environmental deterioration.

Furthermore, the acceleration of urbanization can contribute to unstainable resource consumption patterns, notably energy and increased CO2 emissions. It can also lead to uneven distribution of development benefits among urban areas and between urban and rural areas, which in turn can create regional imbalances. These imbalances, if not addressed, could affect national cohesion as well.

That is why, we need to get our cities right!

If we get our cities right, as we collectively decided in the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11, it will be easier to reach other development goals and to achieve meaningful progress in providing a better quality of life for all.

Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

My second point: How can Malaysia address these challenges and move towards a sustainable urban Nation?

Despite these challenges, urbanization in Malaysia presents a major opportunity for positive change at all levels and in all types of human settlements, from small rural communities and market towns, to intermediate cities and metropolises.

In this region, Malaysia has demonstrated that urbanization can have a positive impact on development and deliver improved living conditions for all. Cities and towns can help drive the sustainable agenda bringing with it positive social and cultural change. This is only sustainable if there is adequate environmental protection and when economic growth is more equitable and embraces the principles of the circular economy. Cities can function as a catalyst for innovation, investment and consumption, making them a positive and potent force for addressing issues related to poverty, social exclusion and spatial inequality.

Most importantly, effective and sustainable urban transformation presents an opportunity to work with all members of the community, particularly those traditionally excluded from such processes such as women, youth, old persons and persons with disabilities.

To harness the benefits of urbanization and move towards a sustainable urban nation, Malaysia will need to invest in and strengthen the drivers of sustainable urbanization, namely:

- Integrated national urban policies and plans;
- Participatory urban planning and design;
- Urban governance; and
- Effective finance mechanisms at all levels.

In addition, issues of social inclusion in cities will need to be tackled in a cohesive manner.

Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

A sustainable urban nation is an inclusive urban nation.

Social inclusion dimensions of human rights; gender; children, youth and older persons; and disability must be factored in as Malaysia moves towards becoming a sustainable urban nation.

To achieve these outcomes, 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.

My third point is on the role of UN-Habitat.

As the coordinating United Nations agency on human settlements, UN Habitat is providing support to Malaysia ranging from the most essential need of human beings - housing - to that of the country's highest collective aspiration - a sustainable urban nation. As Malaysia is transforming, you can count on UN-Habitat as your premier partner. UN-Habitat is already working in Penang, Melaka and Iskandar. You all recall that the ninth session of the World Urban Forum was held here in Kuala Lumpur and we hope to expand on that working partnership with Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At UN-Habitat, we are undergoing a profound transformation process as well, including through the formulation of our Strategic Plan 2020-2025, which positions the agency 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 improve urban environment; and
- To support effective urban crisis prevention and response

As part of our new vision and new Strategic Plan, our ambition is to strengthen our partnership with Malaysia and this region. We plan to do this in a number of urbanization related areas, including:

- Access to basic services, sustainable mobility and public space;
- Access to land and adequate and affordable housing;
- Access to decent jobs and livelihoods for youth and women in urban centres;
- Smart cities, smart solutions and innovations for urban development;
- Resource efficiency and sustainable waste management;
- Mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
- Heritage and urban renewal;
- Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals at national, subnational and local levels;

- Social integration and inclusive communities; and
- Resilience of the built environment and infrastructure.

Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

In this urban age, the challenges are many but I believe we can leave this a better world for future generations only when we start working together. UN Habitat is with you, and we are in this together!

We are with Malaysia as the country moves towards a sustainable urban nation, an inclusive urban nation.

I thank you for your attention!