

**Address of Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Maimunah Mohd
Sharif
to the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2018
January 31st, 2018
5:30pm
Trusteeship Council**

It gives me great pleasure to address the youth representatives from all over the world at the ECOSOC Youth Forum here in New York. This is my first statement at UN HQ as the ED of the UN-Habitat.

We at UN-Habitat believe strongly that we must continue to invest in youth all levels including municipal, regional and national level. Today, we face unprecedented urban social, and environmental challenges, from climate change to radicalization. It is often youth who are the front lines in facing these challenges, they are our hope and our future in assuring that we can solve them.

If urbanization is the engine that propels the world towards prosperity in the 21st century then youth are the engineers. Youth are society's most essential and dynamic human resource. There are more people under the age of 25 today than ever, totaling nearly three billion or almost half of the total global population. These youth live, by and large, in cities and towns; the cities of the developing world account for over 90% of the world's urban growth and youth account for a large percentage of those inhabitants. It is estimated that as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030.

This demographic youth bulge is a double-edged sword. If governments,

local governments, city administrations develop national and local youth policies which engage and support youth in education, entrepreneurship, training and access to employment, and create enough space that they can represent themselves in the decision-making processes, youth can become powerful and positive change agents in all levels. If we do not invest in these young people, they can become disheartened, lose hope and turn to violence.

We cannot let this happen. We must invest in youth. UN-Habitat has one of the longest standing youth programmes in the UN system. Since 2003 we have engaged tens of thousands of young people in our programmes; we have trained them jobs in ICT and housing; we have worked with them to create public spaces which contribute to their own and their communities health. We have also worked with the poorest of the poor in slums and informal settlements and in cities and countries facing conflict and violence. Our goal – to give them hope – to give them a hand up – not a hand out. We commit to continuing these programmes and partnering with youth, youth agencies, local and national government and the private sector to assure the programmes are relevant, effective and efficient.

Lastly, we come here to the ECOSOC Youth Forum in 2018 to make a new commitment. The Forum is focused on the role of youth in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities. To advance this, we commit to establishing a Global Network of Urban Youth Councils to contribute to the urban SDGs, to ensure the full engagement of the urban youth in all processes of urban decision-making, including urban rules and regulations; urban planning and design; basic services; housing; community safety; governance and municipal finance. This network, supported by the Municipality of Istanbul, will be a critical step in assuring

that youth are engaged in decision-making, working in partnership with their cities to affect a better world.

Concretely , for this we commit to the following this year:

- Development of 6 Urban Youth Councils Training of Trainers (ToT) modules
- Drafting the Global Urban Youth Councils Network Strategy Note
- Produce a Trainers Handbook
- Prepare and deliver training to 600 urban youth worldwide
- Establish the Global Urban Youth Councils Advisory Group made up of youth council representatives worldwide
- Design and deliver 60 New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals awareness-raising events worldwide

In closing, I would like to invite all of you to come to the Ninth session of the World Urban Forum to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 7 to 13 February 2018 to follow up the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the urban SDGs.

I often say to young people that we must change the Impossible to I am possible. We must envision a positive future, where young people take up leadership in creating health and sustainable communities.

I sincerely wish you the best on your deliberations in the ECOSOC Youth Forum a great success and shall look forward to its recommendations for implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Thank you