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UN-Habitat Assembly concludes with Ministerial Declaration on challenges and opportunities of urbanization.

NAIROBI, 31 May 2019 – National governments taking part in the first UN-Habitat Assembly concluded their five days of discussions with a Ministerial Declaration recognizing that the unprecedented rate of urbanization “constitutes both a challenge and an opportunity”.

Delegations from 127 countries, including four Heads of State and Government and 49 ministers took part in the first UN-Habitat Assembly at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, home to UN-Habitat’s headquarters.

At the end of the UN-Habitat Assembly, delegates adopted five resolutions covering a range of topics, including on: safer cities; capacity building for implementing the New Urban Agenda; achieving gender equality through UN-Habitat’s work to support inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements; enhancing urban rural linkages for sustainable urbanization, and on UN-Habitat’s Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023. There was also a decision on arrangements for the transition to the new governance structure of UN-Habitat.

The meeting confirmed that the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, which will take place every four years, will be held from 5 to 9 June 2023.

The Ministerial Declaration said it was recognized that the “current unprecedented era of increasing urbanization constitutes both a challenge and an opportunity to promote sustainable development”. It called for the “promotion of sustainable patterns of consumption and production” through various methods including smart technologies, sustainable lifestyles and resource efficiency.

The Declaration said the ministers “recognize and fully support the role and expertise of UN-Habitat as a focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements and as a centre of excellence and innovation”.

At the closing session, UN-Habitat Executive Director, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, told delegates they all shared a common drive to improve cities and communities.

“The issues that symbolize our common fight and that bring us together, whether it is extreme poverty, inequalities, slums, social exclusion and marginalization, gender-based discrimination, humanitarian crises, conflicts, climate change, or high unemployment, deserve more attention than our differences,” she said.

The UN-Habitat Assembly opened on Monday with the election of Mexico’s Vice Minister for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, Martha Delgado, as President of the Assembly. In the ceremonial opening, the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta called on delegates to “explore strategic ways of transforming our cities and human settlements into engines of economic growth and development in a sustainable manner”.

During Wednesday’s Partnership and Pledging Conference, USD 152 million was pledged by 21 countries namely: China, Colombia, Republic of Congo, France, the Gambia, Germany, Ghana, India, Japan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, South Africa, South Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland and Zambia.

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The overall theme of the Assembly, “Innovation for a Better Quality of Life in Cities and Communities” was reflected throughout the week including in the High-Level Strategic Dialogue and around the complex with some 90 exhibitors showing exciting new solutions.

This included the computer game Minecraft for inclusive urban planning, recycling food waste for fuel, and using spatial data to effectively respond to urban incidents. There were 57 side events and nearly 30 city stage and press centre events, global business and stakeholder meetings, a youth tent, photo exhibitions and on Thursday evening a concert on the premises coinciding with others, in informal settlements around Nairobi.

Over a third of the 2,900 delegates attending came from national governments, along with 129 from local government (including over 60 Mayors) and around 470 NGO, academic and private sector representatives. The total number of participants, including technical, United Nations staff and entertainers, came to over 3,900 persons.

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