

Opening speech by Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat and Moscow Urban Forum 2019: Quality of Life. Projects for a Better City.

Panel Discussion: New Urban Agenda. What values do cities focus today?

Friday, 5 July 2019 at Zaryadye Concert Hall

Honourable Valdimir Yakushev, Minister of Construction,

Honourable Mayors,

Distinguished Dignitaries,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning!

I am delighted to join you for this important gathering to lead discussions on the New Urban Agenda, which is the key framework, along with the Sustainable Development Goals, for the United Nations as a whole, and UN-Habitat in particular, in accelerating action on urban development

We are meeting this morning under the auspices of the Moscow Urban Forum. I would like to congratulate the city of Moscow and the organizers for the successful Forum so far, and for highlighting the significance of local action at city level to advance the sustainability of our cities and communities.

I would like to thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to speak at this morning's Panel, which is close to my heart. I am very pleased to be sharing this platform with the Minister of Construction, and with several distinguished mayors. As many of you will know I have previously been a Mayor myself. I understand the 'hands-on' nature of the job. I am very pleased to be given this opportunity to share my experiences with all of you.

Honourable Minister, and Mayors, ladies and gentlemen,

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) is about people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships in urban settings. It was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016 in Quito, Ecuador.

The New Urban Agenda is an accelerator for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is the docking station of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. The implementation of the New Urban Agenda are dependent on how the goals, principles, and targets of the other agendas come together. Only then can we unlock their full potential allowing us to align and make the best of available resources at every level of government and across all sectors and stakeholders.

The New Urban Agenda is recognized as the “accelerator” of the urban-related Sustainable Development Goals. This is because, as the Mayors in this room will tell you, it underscores the actions required to achieve these Goals on the ground, in our cities. The battle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be won or lost in cities.

The question of what progress has been made, and is planned, is a fundamental one in securing a sustainable urban future. At the High-Level Political Forum in New York last year, it was concluded Local and National authorities are making uneven progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 of making cities safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable by 2030.

In the three years since the adoption of the NUA, many urban challenges have intensified. Growing inequality, social exclusion, and spatial segregation continue to impact peoples’ lives in most of the world’s cities, producing a dramatic concentration of disadvantages in specific places and for specific people. Urban areas are increasingly epicentres of crises, insecurity, and violence, fuelling displacement and forced migration. Unsustainable models of urbanization persist, including informal and unplanned urban growth that consume excessive land and energy and damage the environment.

It is at the same time evident that cities are successful places of innovation, social change, and prosperity—and drivers of positive change.

The question to answer is how we accelerate the transformative power of cities? What priorities do cities need to adopt?

I would like to highlight **three key stepping stones** for effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda: (i) governance structures and supportive frameworks; (ii) planning and management of urban and territorial spatial development; and (iii) means of implementation such as financing, innovations and capacities.

My first message is about urban governance. Why is it such an important element in reaching urban development goals?

Because weak institutions and poor governance mechanisms increase the risk of low performance, waste of resources, inefficient sectoral interventions, human rights violations and overall lack of progress. Proper institutions and governance mechanisms, together, determine how people, organizations and the private sector make economic, social and political decisions, maximizing potentials and optimizing resources.

Cities need to ensure policy coherence— between actors, sectors, scales of intervention and across the implementation continuum.

National Urban Policies are key instruments to ensure policy coherence by aligning the dynamics of urbanization and the overall process of national development. It is UN-Habitat's observation from 40 years of facilitating urbanisation globally that national urban policies and strategies is key to effectively harnessing the boundless dividends that may be offered by sustainable and inclusive urbanization.

My second message is on planning and management of urban and territorial spatial development.

Effective spatial planning and management, including the use of territorial approaches, plays a key role in enabling the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the

local level. Territorial analysis helps us understand of the potential advantages of urban economies of agglomeration and scale that are critical for economic growth and prosperity.

The “International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning” developed by UN-Habitat are overarching guidelines which have accelerate effective spatial planning. Cities are also applying planned city extensions and infills to accelerate progress towards the NUA commitment of efficient land use.

I am pleased that UN-Habitat is today leading an Executive Training, in collaboration with the Moscow Urban Forum, for senior officials from the Commonwealth of Independent States which includes these Guidelines.

My third message on priorities for cities is on local implementation.

Effective implementation of the NUA requires a wide range of approaches—mobilization of financial resources, innovations, enhanced advocacy, awareness, and focused capacity development.

It requires upscaling of urban innovations, which in turn requires an environment conducive to sharing and learning. Smart city programmes, creative industries, new infrastructure developments and technologies bring important advances in energy, transport, and service provision that have the power to catalyse rapid urban change. Technologically advanced cities are using open data.

Cities are incubators of innovation that can have an impact at scale. Our cities offer an agglomeration of economies and high concentration of creative energy. New technologies can be applied with the clear goal to make our cities more inclusive, safer, sustainable and resilient.

18. Innovation can help us to deliver zero carbon and resilient solutions for infrastructure and buildings at scale and fuel a green economy. We need scalable solutions as we fill the 70% gap of urban infrastructure and as we double our urban space by 2050 and retrofit what we have built so far. It can generate ‘green-centric’ economic growth, providing both high and low-skilled jobs.

There is also an increasing recognition of the productive role of cities and urban territories in financing infrastructure to ensure inclusion, prosperity and sustainability. We can see progress in urban financing through fiscal decentralization, managing local assets, mobilizing local resources through property tax reforms, gender-budgeting, diversifying sub-national government revenue sources and improving revenue administration

As mayors and city leaders, you know as well as I do, that cities that perform well do not happen by accident. They need and they have these ingredients.

I would like to conclude by a few comments on measuring and sharing progress on the New Urban Agenda:

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the central mechanism for assessing and reporting progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We have the support of national governments to collect data but we need cities like Moscow to take the lead at local level to ensure the right kind of data is collected.

UN-Habitat is responsible for reporting on the follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda, through Quadrennial Reports published by the United Nations Secretary General. This is an incremental and inclusive approach coordinated by UN-Habitat, as a focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements, in collaboration with other UN system entities. This report illustrates the progress being made by UN agencies, national and sub-national governments, local authorities and stakeholders, in its implementation and monitoring.

The leading role in reporting on the New Urban Agenda lies with national governments, through country-led, voluntary reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

At the same time, knowledge-sharing mechanisms and inclusive reporting platforms are essential for engaging partners and collecting data in a cross-sectoral manner. UN-Habitat is leading the development of a global, user-friendly New Urban Agenda Platform for these purposes, which will be launched at our World Urban Forum in February next year.

The second Quadrennial Report in 2022 will include quantitative and qualitative data. We look forward to partnering with all of you in this process.

There are several key events on the Road Map to exchange lessons and best practices on how cities adapt and innovate to achieve sustainable urban development. I have the honour to invite you to the global World Cities Day celebrations, which is this year hosted in the city of Ekaterinburg, herein Russia on 31 October 2019. I also want to take the opportunity to warmly welcome you to our World Urban Forum, that will be held in Abu Dhabi in February 2020.

I would like to close by inviting us all to rethink our way of life and the way we urbanize. The goals and targets are clear. The implementation of the New Urban Agenda sets out the how.

Thank you.