

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

UN-Habitat and Moscow Urban Forum Executive Training: “Essentials of Urban Policies and Planning for Sustainable Cities in the Commonwealth of Independent States”

Friday, 5 July 2019 at Zaryadye Park, Moscow

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Dobroye utro!

On behalf of UN-Habitat, I wish to convey our most sincere appreciation and pleasure to be part of the first training at the Moscow Urban Forum on urban policies and planning for sustainable cities in CIS countries.

In my opening speech, I would like to share three main messages:

My first message is to highlight the **importance of urban and territorial planning to ensuring a sustainable future.**

Cities are connected to a surrounding region with which they share resources and opportunities. A territorial perspective to the management of cities and their surrounding regions helps to distribute jobs, develop economies of scale and balance demands for growth with the need to protect ecological assets. Urban planning provides the framework to manage land with the rational organization of limited resources such as water and energy. Planning allows for prioritization of national and municipal budgets by identifying the right kind of investments in infrastructure and services.

“Planning and managing urban spatial development” is one of the three pillars of effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Approved in October 2016, at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), the New Urban

Agenda is essentially an action blueprint for countries to achieve sustainable development using an urban perspective.

UN-Habitat is the focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements. We work in collaboration with other UN agencies for the implementation and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda. We, at UN-Habitat are committed to the achievement of Goal 11 of the 2030 Development Agenda which aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Today's topic for the training programme relates directly to three targets of SDG 11 (11.a¹, 11.3², and 11.7³) on enhancing urban-rural linkages, planning capacities and public spaces.

The correct policies on density, land use, public space and the layout of infrastructure and services influence the urban form and patterns. **Knowing how to choose the urban pattern that best delivers the needs of a city and its surrounding region is a key skill successful city leaders must develop.**

This brings me to my second message: **UN-Habitat is committed to improving planning practice and outcomes across the globe.**

For this we are supporting countries and partners through our guidance frameworks and tools, through technical support on specific projects in cities as well as capacity development of town planners. **UN-Habitat has designed an international training programme on urban planning and design to address the specific concerns of CIS⁴ cities.**

The broader impact strategy is to share practical and tested approaches with urban managers and leaders that will contribute to increasing spatial equity across the national

¹ 11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.

² 11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.

³ 11.7 Provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces by 2030.

⁴ Commonwealth of Independent States includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan (associate member), (Ukraine* in process to withdraw), and Uzbekistan

territory, economic productivity of cities and the quality of life for citizens. The training is designed to bridge the gap between the technical and the policy dimensions of urban planning and to support national and local leaders to better communicate with their technical planning departments and ask the right questions.

Despite their differences, cities in CIS countries share a common history and have inherited similar urban patterns. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) includes a diverse group of countries⁵, characterised by both growing and shrinking economies, and different demographic profiles. They are well planned, with abundant public spaces and provision for social services. While the inclusion aspect of affordable access to public services must be applauded, there are some challenges. Across this region, capital cities, administrative centres and major cities continue to play the leading role in national economies. They attract from 40-80 % of total investments. Imbalanced spatial development has led to the stagnation of small and medium human settlements. Often, the key problem of small and medium-sized cities derives from their focus on a single industry (also known as mono-cities), that goes back to the days of the planned economy. This has limited the capacity of urban economies to adapt to new conditions. The transition to a market economy has put forward new requirements for the territorial management aimed at increasing cities' competitiveness and investment attractiveness.

The good news is that we can see some positive trends and efforts. In CIS countries, current planning efforts towards regeneration and sustainable planning must be acknowledged for their innovation. Urban renewal and regeneration, particularly of inner industrial areas capture the result from well-planned and managed urbanization.

Despite the successes some challenges remain. The principle of centralized management remains dominant in many CIS countries as opposed to the principle of subsidiarity advocated by international planning principles. The low level of fiscal capacity is a

constraining factor for sustainable urban development and most cities are facing an

⁵ includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan (associate member), (Ukraine*), and Uzbekistan

underdeveloped system of local revenues, based on subsidies rather than local resources. The practices of effective population engagement in urban planning, management and development have not been fully regulated across the CIS countries. There is a threat that local authorities may ignore public interests and disregard the needs of the population, which may cause conflicts and social tensions in the society.

Recognizing the interconnectedness and complexity of several of these issues, UN-Habitat has stepped up its role to assist countries to improve their planning policies, plans and designs. The global call to reinvent spatial planning into a broader territorial approach (a) multi-level - cutting across administrative boundaries and (b) integrated across urban sectors has been a demand from UN member states from over a decade ago (World Urban Forum in Vancouver in 2006) and is now well-articulated in global frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda and the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning about which you will learn more about today. **The need of the hour now is to disseminate knowledge of global principles to improve real policies, plans and designs** and deliver better outcomes for cities - and this is my third and final message.

While UN-Habitat is committed, the sheer volume of work required by 2030 for integration across sectors, spatial scales and stakeholders is significant. **UN-Habitat cannot achieve this by working in countries alone.** It is for this reason that my final message is a reiteration of our commitment to sustainable development through well-planned and well-managed cities. Partners must join hands and make serious efforts to scale up their commitment to the New Urban Agenda. Otherwise, we will not make it by 2030. I encourage you to think about what role you can take in this collective effort.

I would like to close with sincere congratulations to (highest level person in the room) and the co-organisers of the Moscow Urban Forum. **My best wishes to the participants** for a fruitful exchange on how these global principles can be applied locally to make your city more sustainable.

Thank you.