

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

**Civil Society Roundtable on UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023**

**Tuesday 10 September 2019 at Canada House, London**

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**Salutations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to be in London and particularly at Canada House, at the invitation of H.E. Ms. Janice Charette, the High Commissioner of Canada to the United Kingdom.

Ladies and gentlemen, at UN-Habitat we appreciate very much the role of civil society as key partners in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 11 “making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In fact, Madame Amina Mohamed, the United Nations Deputy-Secretary-General, considers SDG #11 as the ‘docking station’ for all the other SDGs.

Precisely because urbanisation is happening at an alarming rapid pace and that it is cross-cutting, we need to take a multilateral approach. Canada’s support together with that of other member states from the Commonwealth of Nations is therefore much appreciated.

We need this kind of cross-cutting cooperation not only at the global level but also at the national level where all sectors of the nation need to work together to consolidate resources when facing the challenges associated with rapid urbanisation. This means working together at all levels of government, the private sector, civil society and professional groups.

It is very clear that we need to work collectively to achieve the SDGs. Member States adopted the New Urban Agenda as a tool that we can all use to achieve the urban dimensions of the SDGs and as of May we have our new Strategic Plan. This four-year plan will be for the period of 2020-2023. It is a bold and ambitious effort as we need to transform the way we plan, design, build and manage cities.

At the recently concluded UN-Habitat Assembly, member states including those from the Commonwealth of Nations, endorsed the Strategic Plan. Before I flesh out the details of the Strategic Plan, let me explain that it is founded on UN-Habitat’s vision of “a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world”. More importantly, we are convinced that the best way to ensure we have a bright future is to ensure that urbanisation is better planned and managed.

We have also assured member states that we are moving away from being oriented around volume of projects - being output-driven - to being more impact-oriented. At the same time, I have impressed it upon my colleagues and our partners that we need to have a more strategic approach where one size does not fit all. Instead, I have explained that there are six typologies in the urbanisation continuum.

The first typology are places where planning is nascent and not systematic. Whilst their condition may seem rudimentary, each of these places have their own unique challenges. It is important for us to apply an integrated approach when helping them develop the appropriate urbanisation strategies. The second typology involves places where strategic plans were developed before the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs. They are seeking our help to align and to ensure they take into account the SDGs as the basis for their planning system.

The third typology has to do with places where they have incorporated the SDGs and the NUA into their planning system but that needs to be refined and evaluated. They want to work with us to develop impact indicators and other monitoring systems. The fourth typology are places that have already put all the necessary systems in place but are now keen to see how to regenerate their established urban environments. Many of these places are keen to develop urban regeneration strategies.

The last two include places that are in conflict and that require long-term planning as they seek to be more resilient in the face of climate change respectively. Places in conflict require long-term planning to ensure they are truly transitional whilst with the world facing a climate emergency, we need to build resilient places.

These typologies of human settlements form the basis for the interventions of the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan. As some of you may already know, to be truly transformative and impactful, we have identified four clear domains of change. The first is reduced poverty and inequality between rural and urban areas; the second is enhanced shared prosperity for cities and regions; the third is strengthened climate action and improved urban environment; and finally, effective urban crisis prevention and response.

There are also a set of cross-cutting issues like gender mainstreaming, youth involvement, people with disabilities and other social inclusion issues that will be the focus throughout the implementation of the Strategic Plan. We have also identified four drivers of change including policy-making, planning, governance and financing mechanisms that will be used as channels when rolling out the strategic plan.

At the recently concluded UN-Habitat Assembly we also convened a Stake-holders Forum and a declaration was presented to me. The key message from the over 100 delegates representing a broad range of civil society organisations and special interest groups is that we need to broaden the space to involve civil society. In New York this past July and at the sidelines of the High-Level Political Forum, I met with civil society leaders and I asked them in what ways would they like to be more involved?

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

I would like to ask the same question here as I know that the Commonwealth of Nations represent the most dynamic range that represent the entire urbanisation continuum. More importantly, and speaking as a Malaysian and a planner trained here in the United Kingdom, we also share a common culture, language and legal institutions. Although we have evolved very differently, this basis for wider understanding persists and in a good way.

Based on the Stakeholders Declaration, which identifies clear areas of possible collaboration, I would like to hear from you on how we can work together. Transformative



change can only happen if we find a way to work together, concentrate resources where it is most needed and innovative solutions to pressing urban challenges.

At the heart of this lies the direct engagement with young people and communities. It is leaders, such as yourselves who are here today who can lead the transformation towards low-carbon, climate-resilient, and smart cities of the future.

Moving towards the implementation of our new strategic plan, I would like to take the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to work with all of you, and to reaffirm the critical role that civil society plays in tackling the global environmental challenges together. Finally, allow me to also direct all of you to join us at the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi in February 2020, where I hope we can achieve gender parity in all our panels and platforms; so I call upon you to join us there in big numbers to ensure that civil society is not only seen and heard but have a direct stake in shaping the world's premier global forum.

**It's time for action so, let's join hands to ensure no place and no one is left behind.**