

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

**World Cities Day 2019 - Global Observation of World Cities Day**

**Thursday 31 October 2019 at Ekspo Bul'var, 2, Ekaterinburg**

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**Mayor of Ekaterinburg, Aleksandr Vysokinskiy,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The time has come for us to close our deliberations for the global observance of World Cities Day 2019.

I would like to express my gratitude to all panelists and experts, and once again thank our hosts—the Government of the Russian Federation, the Governor of Sverdlovsk, and the Mayor of Ekaterinburg, and their teams—for the warm hospitality and effective running of this international event. We are honoured to have had this opportunity to hold a UN-Habitat flagship global event in Russia, and in this part of the world. We hope that this is the first, in many more to come.

World Cities Day marks the end of Urban October – the month when UN-Habitat encourages everyone to focus on the role of our cities and towns in addressing the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly urbanizing world. But it does not mean we will now, at the end of October, stop this focus, energy and commitment to improve our cities!

It is my hope that, on the contrary, we have collected new ideas, best practices, inspiration, and developed partnerships and started networks, and that we will find ways to operationalize them in our respective cities and organizations.

A few key take-aways from the themes we have addressed:

**Digital innovation for urban service delivery:** Digital innovation has great potential to increase access to, as well as efficiency and affordability of urban services such as energy, solid waste management, transport or social services. Cities are tasked to provide enabling frameworks for innovation creation and adoption to enhance urban service delivery, while ensuring inclusion of all, notably marginalized groups and respecting the “soul of cities”.

**Frontier technologies for more inclusive cities:** While visualizing the huge potentials of technological innovations in our cities, let us not forget the inclusion, human rights, and participation aspects of smart, sustainable cities. This is essential to leave no one behind, as we have committed to in Agenda 2030. How can we use innovation to reduce the growing inequalities we see in so many places? It is one of the questions worth reflecting on as we close this conference.

**Opportunities for urban renewable energy generation:** Cities can accelerate the transition to renewable energy by exploiting entry points such as building, transport, solid and liquid waste management sectors, capitalizing on the benefits of a circular economy and adopting sustainable production and consumption patterns. What we need is to remove economic, technical, behavioral, and political barriers to foster even more opportunities for urban renewable energy generation.

Last year, at the occasion of World Habitat Day, I launched the “Waste Wise Cities Campaign” to tackle waste management issues worldwide. So far almost 100 cities from all over the world have joined the campaign.

I urge to you join and support the “Waste Wise Cities Campaign” and help us move from enhanced recycling to the concept of Zero Waste. We have just launched a call “Waste Wise Cities Challenge”: cities are invited to apply either as “Challenger City”, committing to clean up their cities and set up the foundation of sustainable waste management system by 2022, or as “Supporter City”, pledging to support a Challenger City to rise to the challenge. I warmly invite cities in Russia to apply and engage for a long-term positive change in waste management!

Innovations for future generations (youth engagement): Effective and inclusive multi-stakeholder governance is needed to enhance collaboration with the private sector, government entities and civil society to introduce impactful solutions to cities - and where young people’s capacity is utilized. The best way to get fresh ideas is through our youth- and I want to take note of our excellent collaboration with the National Youth Council of Russia. I commend Russia’s system of young SDG Ambassadors- which is, in and of itself, a best practice that other countries can learn from.

Dignitaries, ladies and gentlemen,

The UN family has formally recognized urbanisation as a “mega trend” and the urban theme has now been elevated and integrated throughout the UN by our Secretary-General. We are especially pleased to have had with us here today the UN Team Rotating Chair in Russia, and several

of our UN sister agencies which have all highlighted the inter-connections between their core mandates and the urban dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. If we are to achieve the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and, end extreme poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity for everyone, we must strengthen our collective efforts in the UN system, and with all our partners, to get urbanization right, for 70 per cent of the world population is projected to live in cities in 30 years.

I would also like to give a special thanks to our international and Russian experts for their important contributions the last two days. Our short TED talks earlier today have highlighted excellent ideas and practices, that need to be shared and applied.

Our partners on the Shanghai Manual are very keen on the compilation and sharing of good practices, and we look forward to a strengthened collaboration to make best practices in the area of sustainable urban development globally known.

In this regard, I am pleased to share with you that we will at WUF 10 in Abu Dhabi be launching a New Urban Agenda Platform, as a virtual meeting place where National Governments will share progress on implementing the New Urban Agenda and urban-related SDG, and all partners will be able to share their experiences, practices and stories. We will make sure that the innovative practices we have harnessed in the last two days will also be shared through this Platform.

We have had an impressive number of participants with us over the last two days, which I would also like to sincerely appreciate. We have had with us today: 1) number of participants, 2) gender ratio, 3) percentage of youth. [SUZY TO ADD]

Let us close by remembering how important this moment is for us all. We need to look carefully at the challenges and opportunities of urbanization and ensure that our cities and human settlements are safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

UN-Habitat's commitment to our vision of "a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world" is supported by our mantra: Think, Do, Partner and Share. This is the recipe we hope you will take with you after our informative and energizing days together here in Ekaterinburg.

We look forward to seeing many of you at our next global event- the World Urban Forum, which will be held in Abu Dhabi in February next year. Please join us there, and until then, we wish you a safe travel back for those who have come from afar to join us here today.

Sincere congratulations once again to all the co-organisers of this Conference, to my team, and to all of you for your active participation and contributions to make this day a success.

Thank you.