



**Speech by the Executive Director, UN-Habitat, on the occasion of the
Official Opening, Tenth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10)
Sunday 9th February 2020, Abu Dhabi**

**Your Highness Sheikh Theyab bin Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Member of
the Executive Council, Chairman of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's Court,**

**Your Excellency, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of
Afghanistan,**

**Your Excellency, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for
EYE-TOO-KAY Affairs and Sugar Industry of the Republic of Fiji,**

**Your Excellency Falah Al Ah-babi, Chairman of the Department of Municipalities
and Transport, representing the Local Organising Committee of World Urban
Forum 10.**

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the tenth session of the World Urban Forum. This is the first time the WUF is taking place in the Arab region and we cannot ask for a better host than the emirate of Abu Dhabi. With the indulgence of His Highness, please accept the grateful thanks of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, for your generous support.

The leadership of His Excellency Falah Al Ah-babi and the Department of Municipalities and Transport, including His Excellency Mohamed Al Kader, has truly made this a demonstration of good cooperation between the United Nations and Abu Dhabi.

Your Highness, this 10th session of the World Urban Forum is full of special significance. Not only is the WUF truly coming of age as the world's premier gathering of thinkers and doers for sustainable urbanisation, but this year, WUF coincides with the 75th anniversary year of the United Nations.

As stated by the Secretary-General, the world needs multilateralism to resolve the great challenges of our times - the climate emergency and its underlying causes - an economic system that is unsustainable. WUF demonstrates of the kind of cooperation the world

needs today, bringing together over 80 ministers, 70 mayors and over 18,000 participants from 140 nations.

The growth trajectory of the WUF demonstrates the importance of Sustainable Development Goal #11. The concentration of resources, talent, capital and power in city-regions is the mega trend of this new millennium. With 60% of the world's population projected to live in urban areas by 2030, urbanisation is inevitable and if left unplanned, it will continue to lead humanity deeper into the climate emergency and higher forms of inequality and deprivation.

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

As all of you know, we have the ability to turn urban challenges into opportunities. This is why the theme of this 10th session of the World Urban Forum is entitled “Cities of Opportunities”. In the past four decades, UN-Habitat has worked with communities, local and national governments to demonstrate that integrated, holistic and participatory planning can turn urbanisation into a development bonus. We need urban planners, architects, sociologists and other related professionals to help steer decision-makers towards sustainable development.

Ultimately, we need visionary leadership. Please allow me to acknowledge and thank His Excellency Mohammed Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and His Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji for their continued support of UN-Habitat. It is their sense of urgency, their ability to translate policy into practice and to regard urbanisation in holistic terms—and not as something sectoral to be confined to any single ministry—that will ensure urbanisation can be transformed into opportunities for sustainable development.

SDG #11 is where all of the SDGs come together for safe, sustainable and inclusive development. The only way we can realise this potential is if we can bring together key thinkers, doers, financiers, grassroots leaders, youth, women, people with disabilities, older persons, and decision-makers to think and do in a different scale. Get all of them to turn urbanisation into a net positive contributor to life on earth.

The Decade of Action called for by the Secretary-General opens a wonderful window of opportunity to the sustainable urban development agenda. Urbanization and cities are considered as an entry point for the 17 goals because their density, economies of scale and proximity are akin to an invisible string that brings all the development goals together. WUF ten is more than a conference; it is a social accounting act, and an opportunity to reaffirm commitments beyond general statements and declarations..



In order to ensure the solutions implemented are comprehensive and not merely reactive, we need a convener, a facilitator and an investor. Through the WUF, UN-Habitat and our generous host cities have the opportunity to convene the world's single biggest urban forum. This year, despite the challenges, we have some 18,000 registrants. At this point, please allow me to express solidarity with the citizens of the People's Republic of China and especially our friends in the city of Wuhan, who continue to work very hard and at great cost to their economy to keep the rest of us safe.

At UN-Habitat we rely on partnerships like the one we have with city governments like Wuhan, Nairobi and Abu Dhabi to ensure that the urban solutions we provide are catalytic and can be implemented at scale. UN-Habitat is a relatively small UN agency, and we focus intensively on our technical expertise, and cooperation with cities, to localise the SDGs. Through our flagship programmes, research, and technical excellence we believe that member states and all our partners can deliver urban solutions that have greater positive impact for the most vulnerable communities on the ground.

We have a full agenda ahead of us this week, and the opportunity for innovation. This brings me to the theme of the forum. Each WUF is unique for its theme. Cities of Opportunities --- Connecting Culture and Innovation refers to the need to regard culture in the broadest sense. We need to be nimble, not backward looking but embracing change, be inclusive and ask what can I do to make my city more resilient, inclusive and happy?

Culture and innovation are a creative capital that has direct implications on various dimensions of development and prosperity. They do not happen by accident. They require a creative process that is embedded in the way urban centres operate. It is not just for governments or business, but for the entire society to contribute with its own powers of imagination and creative transformation. And this has to be encouraged, properly established, institutionalized and legitimized.

Historically, urbanization trends and conditions and the development of regions have largely been influenced by culture; and in turn, culture has also been influenced by urbanization. Understanding this relationship is critical to bring value to development, prioritizing actions and ensuring policy-outcomes that are human-centred, inclusive and equitable.

The WUF is not a legislative forum but a unique one where governments meet stakeholders. What I hope to see from the 10th session is a set of declared actions. Commitments that we will make on a voluntary basis as individuals, communities, cities and countries; and even at local, regional and global levels that help mark this Decade of Action to accomplish the SDGs by 2030.



From this 10th session of WUF here in Abu Dhabi, let us repurpose this forum, strengthen it and make a new legacy. Let me share my aspirations for this forum.

From WUF10 onwards till 2030 - we declare our commitments and review the progress of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Secondly, let us take up this unique opportunity to be different and bold, taking an appropriate stand on what we want to change and how --- and daring to communicate what the next steps are and declare them. You can find our blueprint in the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023 and our flagship programmes.

Finally, let us commit to come together every two years till 2030 and beyond merely advocating for a better future in a rapidly urbanizing world, and to do all we can to ensure no one and no place is left behind.

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.

