



**Speech by the Executive Director, UN-Habitat, on the occasion of the
Official Closing, Tenth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10)
Thursday 13th February 2020, Abu, Dhabi**

Your Excellency Mohamed Al-Kader, Executive Director of the Department of Municipalities and Transport, representing the Local Organising Committee of World Urban Forum 10,

Your Excellency Madame Martha Delgado, President of the UN-Habitat Assembly,

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

A very good morning to all of you

Assalam Aleikum

This tenth session of the World Urban Forum held here in Abu Dhabi has achieved a remarkable number of milestones. All of you know that in terms of numbers, quality presentations, gender balance amongst the speakers, the quality of the exhibitions, the integrated spaces and the opportunities for chance encounters; WUF10 has set a new benchmark in this urban olympiad.

Let me take the opportunity to thank the leadership of His Excellency Falah Al Ah-Babi and the Department of Municipalities and Transport, including His Excellency Mohamed Al Kader and the local organising committee for their hospitality, kind cooperation and expertise. They have truly contributed substantially to the World Urban Forum. My team and I have learned a lot from them and I know that this is why Abu Dhabi is such a remarkable place.

Your Excellency, this 10th session of the World Urban Forum is now coming to a close. I said to my team that having worked so closely with all of you, I feel very touched and also sad. But I am also happy to say that this is just the beginning of strengthening further the existing partnership with the emirate of Abu Dhabi and I look forward to working closely with you and the team on our various legacy programmes.

At the opening ceremony and throughout the forum, we heard member states, local governments, the private sector, civil society, grassroots leaders, women's groups and

youth champions; all of us saying and insisting on the common goal of leaving a legacy of a better world for future generations. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of Her Excellency Madame Martha Delgado, President of the UN-Habitat Assembly and Co-Chair of the Advisory Group. I would also like to thank her for her commitment and stewardship at WUF10.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this juncture at WUF10 as we prepare to go separate ways, I am reminded of a particularly significant conversation I had here in Abu Dhabi. I was told a touching story about a grandfather. Throughout grandfather's youth when the body was strong, he had good health but no peace. When peace finally came, grandfather had grown old and the body had grown weak. Grandfather never had peace and health at the same time. Yet this grandfather worked hard to ensure that future generations had both. At 75, the United Nations reminds me of this story and I am also reminded of my parents, especially my mother. Because of them, because of the sacrifices of past generations, many of us are enjoying peace and good health but it is a privilege that we did not earn. The best we can do is to pass it forward and to ensure that others get to enjoy both peace and good health, the ingredients for happiness.

This idea of passing it forward is the common thread running throughout the theme "Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation". All three ingredients - culture, innovation and cities - are co-dependent and co-creating. Human settlements exist and excel on the dynamic mixture of cultures. Culture is kept alive and dynamic by innovation, which happens through the coming together of talent and resources in cities. It is this co-dependency that gives rise to the best expressions of human achievement. It is also the best of humanity that is passed down to us as legacy.

The best way we can pass it on to future generations is by doubling our efforts and commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals. We began this 10th session of the World Urban Forum with a call to action. The WUF is an opportunity to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the commitments we said we would do to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

WUF10 has given us some good ideas on how we can achieve the SDGs. At WUF10, through some 400 thought provoking sessions, some key ideas have emerged. We agree that urban heritage - both cultural and natural - is an asset and enables sustainable development. Attention to the urban rural continuum and to nature in cities is essential. Participatory community engagement and innovation are key means to achieve this. An integrated approach to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda by all levels of government and by various stakeholders is crucial for the achievement of sustainable urban development and the overall prosperity of cities and human settlements. Finally,



we need to critically link data to evidence-based policy formulation, development of action plans and sources of funding.

Actions as you know speak louder than words. Change must begin at home. I told my own team that we have put forward our Strategic Plan 2020-2023 and the flagship programmes, which represent our aspirations. They help us to focus so that we can be better equipped to help member states, local governments and communities to take up the call to action for sustainable urban development. I would like appeal to the Member States to integrate the urban dimension in your development plans. I would also like to appeal to Member States to help us raise the necessary resources so that we can serve better.

But we too need to declare our actions and heed the call of member states, partners and the communities we serve. I am happy to report that we have been working very hard at WUF10 to ensure this becomes a reality. Both my Deputy Executive Director and myself had a total of 71 bilateral meetings with member states and high level representations from the the various communities gathered here today. We are committed to transform the way we work and communicate so that we can serve “we the peoples” as stated in the UN Charter.

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Let me take this opportunity to thank all of you including those delegates and participants who had to leave early and to those registrants who signed up but could not make it. This tenth session of the World Urban Forum could not have happened without your sense of urgency, the commitments you are ready to implement and the collective action that we have declared together. UN-Habitat launched the New Urban Agenda Platform to monitor the implementation of these commitments as mandated by the UN General Assembly.

SDG #11 is where **all of the SDGs come together** for safe, sustainable and inclusive development. Through the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions, we now have the **what, how and when** components as well. WUF10 at Abu Dhabi has brought together thinkers and doers; it has highlighted the concerns of the most vulnerable communities who are most negatively impacted by rapid urbanisation and the climate emergency. We also know that these communities are contributing the least carbon emissions yet they are bearing the brunt of our unsustainable lifestyles.

It is UN-Habitat’s responsibility to convene and convey the most urgent messages from these communities. Women and girls are still not at the table in decision-making; boys and young men are being left behind in terms of formal education; the youth bulge in many developing countries do not have jobs and their aspirations are stifled by a lack of upward mobility; and grassroots communities are finding themselves ignored. I



would also like to convey the aspirations of the business community, who are also looking into new ways of creating true value from their investments.

It is not enough that we use the WUF as a platform to shine the light on the plight of these communities. We need to act and we need to accelerate our actions. As a former mayor you will understand my insistence on action. I still recall with great anguish the loss of lives at an old peoples home during the 2018 floods in my city. We were left helpless as these persons drowned in the rising waters. With the climate emergency upon us, we need plan-led urbanisation so that we are not left helpless as extreme weather and rising sea levels threaten the world's major cities and human settlements.

It is heartening to know that in the UAE, great efforts are being made to plant thousands of trees to off-set the carbon footprint of our gathering. A lot of effort is being made to ensure that help and support is provided to those in the developing world. The UAE is one of the most generous countries helping where they can and where there is greatest urgency and need.

I am also informed that we have secured firm commitments by the Commonwealth of Nations to put sustainable urbanisation front and centre at their Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at Kigali in Rwanda in June this year. Similarly, at the African-France conference in Bordeaux also in June, the Francophone countries will come together to double their efforts to support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. I also received a strong delegation from the all countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Russian Federation. Not forgetting small island nations and all 47 LDC countries, all represented at WUF10. In fact, you will be glad to know that a total of 169 nations are represented here at the forum. Please let me thank our member states for taking up the initiative to register their willingness to accelerate the implementation of SDG #11.

In the coming two years, we will definitely need to ensure that these committed actions are turned into reality so that we can deliver the most positive impact to the communities that need it most. We cannot localise the SDGs without local governments. As a former mayor, I am very proud of my colleagues for doubling their efforts to ensure that they carry out voluntary local reviews. But more importantly, is their commitment to help each other. Please share your knowledge, methodology, technology and experience so that all cities can fulfil their declared actions.

As you all know, the WUF is also a platform to present innovations. The SDG Cities flagship accompanied by the City Investment Facility has been very well-received. UN-Habitat is ready to expand our role as bridge-builder linking financing with cities to ensure that plan-led development contributes holistically so that no one is left behind. An economic model based upon the SDGs will not be easy to implement but as we have heard from the Local & Regional Governments, Women's, Grassroots, Business, Youth



Assemblies; we need to do things differently if we want to leave a positive legacy for future generations.

At the United Nations, we are ready to work as one. Ten UN Resident Coordinators were present at WUF10. Throughout the forum, we had high level representation from our sister agencies. We are very happy to see the active participation by UNESCO, UNDP and UNDSR in the advisory group highlighting the key concerns around culture, development and migration.

As we work towards reporting on our accomplishments at the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, allow me to say to the Government of Poland and the city of Katowice that UN-Habitat is ready to work closely with you in the very near future. Let me take this opportunity to announce that the expression of interest for the twelfth session World Urban Forum is now officially open.

Finally, let me thank the Department of Municipalities and Transport once again for their generosity and professionalism in the organising of this tenth session of the World Urban Forum. Allow me to also acknowledge the excellent services of ADNEC and this amazing venue. We have truly forged a strong partnership between Abu Dhabi and UN-Habitat. My team is looking forward to continue collaborating with the Department of Municipalities & Transport to ensure the legacy of the WUF10 resonates down the years.

Thank you, Your Excellency Mohamed Al-Kader, Executive Director of the Department of Municipalities and Transport, representing the Local Organising Committee of World Urban Forum 10.

Your Excellency Madame Martha Delgado, President of the UN-Habitat Assembly

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, with that I declare that the tenth session of the World Urban Forum is officially closed.

Till we meet again at Katowice in Poland in 2022, I thank you.

