

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
Executive Board Meeting
15th to 16th November 2021

Agenda item 1
Opening of the meeting

Statement by the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor. It is my honor to address this Executive Board meeting on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group. At the outset, I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to UN-Habitat, as well as to UNON and to our Host Country, for the practical arrangements for this hybrid meeting. We are indeed encouraged by the resumption of intergovernmental meetings in the Gigiri compound. At the same time, it seems important to keep in mind that the pandemic is not yet behind us. We trust that all in-person participants of this meeting will strictly abide by the UNON guidelines at all times.

Mr. Chairman,

As we begin this Executive Board meeting, GRULAC reiterates its firm support to the important work undertaken by UN-Habitat in supporting sustainable urbanization and in assisting Member States, through all levels of government, to implement the New Urban Agenda and to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 11. In this Decade of Action to Deliver the SDGs, GRULAC pays tribute to the unique role of UN-Habitat in the UN system as a forum for reflection and action on the urban dimension of Agenda 2030.

GRULAC understands that an urban perspective is essential for the success of public policies to face all sorts of challenges, from climate change to overcoming COVID-19. The knowledge and expertise developed by UN-Habitat becomes all the more relevant as we realize that, by 2050, more than 2/3 of the world's population will be living in cities. The pandemic has also shown that we need UN-Habitat more than ever. Urban areas accounted for 90% of reported cases. Cities are bearing the brunt of the crisis, many with strained health systems and inadequate water and sanitation services - especially in poorer areas, where the pandemic has exposed deeply rooted inequality. Let us not forget that one-quarter of the world's urban population lives in slums. Even with extremely limited resources, UN-Habitat has been able to support the overall response to the pandemic in 37 countries and more than 250 cities. GRULAC applauds the leadership of the Executive-Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif in this regard. We are left to wonder about the extent of the additional impact that UN-Habitat could have had, if it had been properly funded.

GRULAC is aware of the financial limitations that UN-Habitat is facing and we wish to reiterate our trust in the capacity and leadership of its staff to carry out its crucial mandate through these challenging times. We reiterate our call on all those countries in a position to do so to contribute financially to the Programme.

Mr. Chairman,

The budget for 2022 and the range for the budget proposal for 2023 are both at the center of the agenda for this Executive Board meeting. In the discussions held within the Working Group for Programmatic, Administrative and Budgetary Matters, it has been frequent to hear calls for more "realism", as if realism only meant not aiming well-beyond what would be reasonable to expect. From GRULAC's point of view, however, realism also means not aiming so low as to virtually impair UN-Habitat's ability to deliver on its mandate, in particular as we try to recover from a pandemic.

As we reflect on the financial challenges faced by UN-Habitat, it becomes clear that the issue is not only on the budget side of the equation. It is also, and more importantly, in the revenue side of the equation. An excessively reduced budget could create more problems than those that it would be trying to resolve. Of course, there should be some correlation between the expected revenue and the proposed budget - but not necessarily one of identity. The past few years have demonstrated that, the lower the budget, the less voluntary contributions are received. Perhaps an excessively streamlined budget erodes the confidence of donors in the ability of UN-Habitat to perform meaningfully, triggering an undesirable and self-reinforcing pattern of erosion.

Also, GRULAC wishes to underscore that one of the effects of the pandemic has been the shift of international financial resources from cooperation towards other priorities. UN-Habitat has certainly been affected by this trend. Let us not assume that the extraordinarily reduced revenue of the pandemic years are going to be the "new normal" as we transition towards recovery.

As GRULAC, we are encouraged by the increase of inclusivity, transparency and accountability that is resulting from the new governance structure of UN-Habitat. We are also confident that the high-level meeting convened by the President of the General Assembly in April 2022 will be an opportunity to raise political awareness on the important mandate performed by UN-Habitat and on the need to fund it adequately.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman