

Speech of UN-Habitat Executive Director Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif at Stockholm+50: Leadership dialogue series

2 June 2022

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

“I wish to thank our hosts Canada and Ecuador, who have long been champions of sustainable urbanization. In 1972 Canada had the foresight to insist that the natural and built environments constitute a singular indivisible ecosystem. Canada went on to host the first Habitat Conference in Vancouver in 1976. Forty years later, Ecuador hosted Habitat III in Quito that gave us the blueprint to achieve sustainable urbanization - the New Urban Agenda.

“Our 50-year journey from Stockholm’72 started with adequate housing, to better governance and through the New Urban Agenda to the realisation of cities as multilevel systems—systems that can effectively tackle the three Confluence of the Three Cs: Climate, Conflict and Covid-19.

“In the case of climate, the built stock of our cities and towns will double by 2050. This means we are about to build all the housing stock in all of human history in three decades. Whether we meet the triple planetary crisis head-on depends on the quality of what we build, how we build it and with what materials.

“Short-term material gain is depriving future generations of an equitable future. Development models increasingly promote sprawl, segregation, and privatisation. These relegate many of the urban poor to informal settlements. We are living beyond planetary means.

“We must find our way back to urbanize in harmony with nature. We must recognise that this is fully within our power to change. When done right, cities can decouple growth from environmental impact.

“Doing things right offers many synergies. Curbing sprawl not only conserves the natural habitat, but also reduces the transmission deadly diseases. Shifting commutes from cars to public transit not only reduces emissions, but also improves air quality and public health.

“Doing things at scale like during the Covid-19 pandemic with the provision of basic services must be the new normal. The 15-minute city is essential for the sake of the climate, other species, and ourselves.

Cities cannot do it alone. National policies and international agendas need to promote healthy urban systems and dynamics. Governments at all levels need to work together to eliminate perverse subsidies. And financial institutions need to de-risk innovative green infrastructure. With your help, better cities can help us achieve the world we need.”