

## Speech at the opening ceremony of the 13th Asia-Pacific Cities Summit

**Date: 27 July 2022**

Dear honourable guests,  
Dear participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you today, at the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Asia-Pacific City Summit. This is my first official mission to Asia-Pacific since the start of the Pandemic. I am now in Fukuoka, tomorrow in Tokyo, then in Singapore and next in Malaysia.

Yesterday, in Fukuoka, I joined the UN-Habitat's Regional Office anniversary celebration, as Fukuoka Prefecture and Fukuoka City have been our generous hosts now for 25 years and going.

This summit goes a long a way and I am happy to see a diverse membership, with city leaders from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam. Many greetings and I crave for the opportunity to meet you all again in person.

UN-Habitat and the Government of Poland hosted the first large urban stakeholder gathering since the start of COVID-19, in the last week of July. The Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum in Katowice attracted almost 17,000 participants. The second largest regional group present was from Asia-Pacific.

At the World Urban Forum, I launched the UN-Habitat's flagship World Cities Report 2022. The theme of the summit connects incredibly well with our flagship report, on **Envisaging the Future of Cities**. Allow me in my remarks here to spark your imagination. The World Cities Report paints an optimistic scenario of urban futures. I will share my views and my optimism.

But before I expand on bold proposals of our report about the future of cities, allow me to recall the New Urban Agenda of 2016 as it is connected with the themes of our summit. "New Value – New Cities" and Actions to Ensure No One is Left Behind; Actions to Achieve Carbon Neutral Society; and Actions to Creating Cities in the New Normal.

The New Urban Agenda, as universally agreed in Quito, Ecuador in 2016, converted the holistic goals of the SDGs into goals for our urban era and offered a framework of capturing the prosperity generated by urbanization, towards a positive outcome for all people.

Our **2022 World Cities Report** sets out to capture the best possible value of urbanization in the context of the huge challenges of our world: health, climate change, rising inequality and economic prosperity.

Let me highlight 10 statements of the report.

1. In East Asia for sure, but also in many middle-income countries elsewhere, the fast-paced global growth in city population is behind us and a future slowdown is in the offing across the urban-rural continuum.
2. In these countries, various levels of government need to plan for greying cities and towns.
3. Vision of an optimistic future of cities must embody a new social contract with universal basic income, health coverage and housing.

4. Building resilience must be at the heart of the future of cities and will not succeed without public participation and prioritization of the poorest and most vulnerable communities.
5. Supporting informal employment is crucial for building inclusive urban futures.
6. Policy makers at all levels must recognize and support the role of urban areas in the net zero transition.
7. Nature-based solutions must be part of inclusive planning processes for sustainable urban futures.
8. The urgency to decarbonize urban economies is driving the convergence of green and smart technologies.
9. Embrace the “15-minute city” concept as a model for creating walkable, mixed-use and compact neighbourhoods.
10. And finally, localizing the New Urban Agenda and SDG11 is the promising pathway to the optimistic scenario of urban futures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having outlined the big propositions to capture the value of urban prosperity, allow me to explore with you the sub-themes of this summit.

The first subtheme on actions leaving no one behind is boldly expanded to the truly big, important question: *how can urban change and transformation genuinely improve the **well-being and the quality of life of all people** in cities and beyond cities.*

In April of this year, Member States reviewed the progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, at the occasion of the High-Level Meeting on the New Urban Agenda convened by the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations. It also dealt with the big, important questions.

Because of the Pandemic, the right to access to adequate housing came into to the spotlight globally. Allow me to share with you the impact of COVID-19 in the developing world : our report estimates that in 2020 the number of new people affected by poverty was between 119 and 124 million, and it increased to 143 and 163 million in 2021. A majority of the new poor live in urban areas, presenting an additional burden to already overstretched local governments.

UN-Habitat appeals for an accelerated policy shift to elevate access to housing as a social welfare right on par with health and income insurance. To do so, more bold policy initiatives are needed: on municipal and regional land strategies, on tenure security, on slum upgrading and transit-oriented development and redevelopment. Local and regional governments need to be more strongly enabled to partake in multi-level housing governance, for instance to stimulate integrated housing, mobility and employment policies for aging people to remain productive in urban economies; and for family -friendly 15-minute cities which optimize digital working and working from home; and for complementary improved public spaces and placemaking opportunities for ordinary citizens and communities.

It goes without say that the second sub-theme of this Summit is the most pressing for survival of the planet. We need urgent actions to achieve carbon-neutral societies and cities.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development cannot succeed without bold actions for a zero-carbon transformation of our world and our cities. SDG13 needs a drastic reversal in emissions.

Cities generate 70% of global emissions. Many cities are heat islands, diminishing the quality of life and of economic opportunities. But cities are also hotbeds of innovation. Cities and their communities generate solutions for a better urban future.

The UN-Habitat session of the Summit, later today, is entirely focused on the urban climate action. Our Regional Office invited one of contributors to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Assessment Report 6 on urban climate change and action. UN-Habitat supports an increasing number of Asia-Pacific developing countries with significant adaptation programming, focused on the poorest, often living in peri-urban areas. Our regional and global partner network on urban climate action brings together expertise to deliver resilience and adaptation results to poor and vulnerable communities.

But more is needed in climate-smart urban basic services. Uncontrolled dump sites generate 8 to 10 percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions. The suite of solutions is known: waste reduction, recycling and low-carbon dump sites. We have offered our guidance how to tackle the challenge and reach greener and cleaner cities in the Fukuoka Method. We need to act to implement these solutions!

Finally, the third sub-theme of this Summit really seeks to expand the horizons of the New Normal, seeking updated urban strategies for innovation and regeneration. At this point, allow me to expand on digital innovation.

In February 2020, UN-Habitat launched its People-Centered Smart Cities Programme. Now, we want to embark on developing global guidance on inclusive smart cities. We are looking for partners among Member States and cities. The urban digital transformation needs to be more aligned with national and local priorities, people’s needs, inclusion and human rights considerations, environmental sustainability, resilience and climate action.

This trend responds to the fact that many smart city projects have been taken a top-down approach, focused on technology solutions. Access and affordability are uneven. The applications in the sharing economy are often not contributing to greener behaviours. Furthermore, the digital economy has an increasing greenhouse footprint often not accounted for.

At WUF11, we started to seek feedback on the key questions, for instance:

1. How do we ensure that the full potential of urban technology and innovation is realized, especially when it comes to reducing the environmental impact of cities?
2. What kinds of technologies are needed to put people-centered smart cities into practice?
3. What are the technology financing gaps and how technology transfer be financed?
4. What multi-level governance framework, regulations, policies and practices are needed for people-centered smart cities?
5. How can we put in place the appropriate multi-stakeholder collaborations for people-centered smart cities. What in particular is the role of the private sector and public-private partnerships?

I will be grateful to hear from city leaders in the Summit about interest for new international guidelines on inclusive urban innovation and digital governance.

Finally, I want to highlight another great feature in the agenda of this Summit. In all three sub-themes for the parallel sessions, they keyword is Action.

We know well enough that the world will not reach all targets of the SDGs by 2030. The Pandemic made it much worse. At the current pace, as per prediction by the statisticians of ESCAP, Asia and the Pacific will reach the targets of the SDGs not in 2030, but in 2065. 2 years of COVID-19 caused 8 years regression. This is dramatic – but we are City Leaders and we thrive on Action.

It is my sincere belief that Local Action can accelerate sustainable development and that we need to accelerate the Localization of the SDGs. This needs to be supported by People’s Action, including youth, civil society, the media, the private sector and other stakeholders.

UN-Habitat and our global stakeholders strongly promote local action and the voluntary local reporting. I am referring to the Voluntary Local Reviews that capture and guide the localization of the SDGs.

Voluntary Local Reviews, if done with many, can be a powerful tool to inform national SDG reporting. In 2022, the Voluntary National Reviews of, for instance, Japan, Indonesia and Thailand already made a first reference to Voluntary Local Reviews. In Malaysia, a consensus is emerging to turn Voluntary Local Reviews into standard reporting tools.

I want to close with my appeal to the Cities and City Leaders who join this unique and recurrent Asia Pacific City Summit to join the Voluntary Local Review movement, if not yet done so.

I look forward to a new generation of Asia Pacific local reviews capturing your plans for new values and new actions in your cities, for strong progress on the SDGs and the 2030 targets, beating the expectations and reverting to the optimistic urban future for all.

My best wishes for a productive Summit and inspiring exchanges.

Thank you so much!