

**Message from UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif 49<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Human Rights Council 28<sup>th</sup> Feb – 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar 2022.**

The mandate of UN-Habitat – to help Member States achieve sustainable urban development for all – is fundamentally grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This has been reflected in the deliberations of the Human Rights Council on a variety of human settlements related issues.

It is within this framework of a human rights-based approach to development, that I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the return to normalcy in territory of Ukraine. Civilians always pay the highest price. This is why the United Nations is scaling up our humanitarian operations in and around Ukraine. To the mayors and community leaders on the frontline, my admiration for your courage and leadership during this difficult time.

At UN-Habitat, we work to provide policy advice and technical assistance, to help Member States progressively advance towards the universal achievement of rights, associated with an adequate standard of living. Access to adequate land, housing, water and sanitation, safety and a healthy urban environment are basic pillars of UN-Habitat's programme of work. Following a human rights-based approach, we prioritise the needs of the poorest and those facing the greatest vulnerability at global, regional and local levels. This includes the needs of those displaced by conflict or natural disaster.

As Executive Director of UN-Habitat, I have prioritised housing, climate change and the localization of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, with the human rights approach as the foundation of all that we do.

Member States are currently facing a complex and severe housing crisis. It is estimated that the global shortage of adequate housing may exceed 440 million unit by 2025. That means more than 1 billion people are without the human right to health, security and wellbeing. In some Member States, this crisis is driven by the tax or market frameworks for housing. In others, poverty, poorly planned development and a lack of public investment may be the dominant factors.

The costs of climate change, particularly those of adaptation, fall heavily on the urban poor. Their homes are often in the most environmentally precarious sites and their water and sanitation systems are the most fragile.

Whether it is housing, the provision of basic services or wider questions of a healthy environment for communities, responsibility often falls to local governments. National governments will set the policy agenda and assign responsibilities. As a former mayor, I know that it is essential, to harness the experience and skills of local governments, and ensure that they have proportionate resource to their obligations. We must localize the Sustainable Development Goals.

Across all of these issues and contexts, the rights-based approach championed by the Secretary-General in his 'Call to Action' and in 'Our Common Agenda', is an effective framework. Considering how national and subnational governments can respect, protect and fulfil the rights of their citizens, and effectively engage them in this process produces better policy with more sustainable outcomes. UN-Habitat's partnerships within and beyond the UN family reflect this.

We have worked closely with the World Health Organisation for many years on policy advice and technical assistance, to improve human health in the urban environment. This partnership now includes looking forward to a post-COVID world, and considering the ways in which the pandemic has reminded us of the value of good urban planning and of an adequate home.

We welcome the convening of advisory groups on urban development by the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, and the UN Economic Commission's convening of a forum of mayors. These have the potential for establishing a regular dialogue, between subnational governments and multilateral forums, that will help deliver our sustainable development ambitions at the local level. This is fundamentally a dialogue about how to deliver human rights, all the way to people's doorsteps.

I wish the Human Rights Council the best in its coming deliberations. Where you touch upon issues of human rights in cities, and the variety of rights related to achieving an adequate standard of living in human settlements, please count on our support. Led by our recently established Geneva Office and with the support of our global network, we will follow and contribute where appropriate.

We will also seek to support the efforts of the High Commissioner and Member States, to consolidate and advance the Universal Periodic Review process. We are ready to provide technical assistance to support the delivery of agreed recommendations. We also look forward to facilitating the engagement of subnational governments, to ensure effective implementation at the local level.

I look forward to working with all of you to achieve a better urban future.

Let me end by inviting all of you to the Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum which will take place in Katowice, Poland from 26 to 30 June 2022.