

Opening remarks of the Executive Director of UN-Habitat at the first session of the Executive Board in Nairobi, Kenya

Date: 28 March 2023

Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director-General of the United Nations Office Nairobi,
His Excellency Silvio Alburquerque, Chair of the Executive Board and the Permanent Representative of Brazil to UN-Habitat,
Honourable Martha Delgado, President of the United Nations Habitat Assembly,
Honourable Zacharia Mwangi Njeru, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Lands Public Works, Housing and Urban Development, representing our host country, the Republic of Kenya,
Honourable Ministers,
Members of the UN-Habitat Executive Board,
Your Excellencies,
Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning, good afternoon and good evening to all of you.

Let me thank my sister Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Director-General of the United Nations Office of Nairobi and her team, as well as our Host Country, the Government of Kenya, for ensuring that we are able to meet in person in Nairobi. Member States at the General Assembly approved the capital investment project to upgrade the conference facilities at UNON, which is most welcome. It has been three years since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, and we are all grateful to the Director-General and her team, who have kept this global UN hub operational and safe throughout those challenging days.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the President of the General Assembly and the President of ECOSOC for their continued support for UN-Habitat. Member States at the General Assembly approved additional allocation involving the conversion of seven posts from the foundation non-earmarked fund to the regular budget, the first time in twenty years. This expression of confidence in UN-Habitat and our mandate is much appreciated.

Let me also appreciate the support of the President of the United Nations Habitat Assembly, Madam Marta Peralta Delgado for her continued support. I recently met her in New York on the sidelines of the UN Water Conference to update her on the preparations for the Executive Board and the second United Nations Habitat Assembly. We are all looking forward to receiving her and her team in Nairobi in June.

I am also very grateful to you, Excellency Chair, for your guidance and enthusiasm for UN-Habitat. As you know, 2022 was particularly challenging but with guidance from the Secretary-General and his team, as well as the Member States, we were able to achieve a surplus in our non-earmarked foundation fund, the first time in twelve years, and also fully paying our reserves on all funding sources. Let me acknowledge the UN-Habitat family of staff, consultants, volunteers and interns, all of whom helped us raise USD 540 million to support the implementation of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan.

In 2023, as we all work towards a successful second United Nations Habitat Assembly, it is my hope that we can keep the Nairobi spirit of collaboration and partnership. Whilst we are rapidly urbanizing, we are also facing powerful storms and crippling droughts. Man-made disasters are also leading to greater urban crisis. The people we serve need us to focus on delivering urban solutions to improve their quality of life. The younger generation are looking at us to do better.

We at UN-Habitat will re-double our efforts to ensure that we help Member States deliver on their commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda. We are now preparing the progress report on the implementation of SDG#11, which will be presented at the High-Level Political Forum in New York in July. Although there are some gains in certain indicators, this achievement is not equal in all parts of the world. It is our collective duty to ensure that no one and no place is left behind in our urbanizing world.

Excellency Chair,

We have been inspired by your guidance to include more voices from the ground. To allow local government representatives, recipient communities and implementing partners to share their impression of UN-Habitat’s work in over 90 countries where we have a presence. Now that travel is possible again, I would like to suggest that Members of this Executive Board consider field visits.

Excellency Chair,

It is my pleasure to present the Executive Director’s 2022 Report. We have come a long way but we need Member State support to realize the full potential of our mandate. Once again, let me thank the Executive Board and you, Excellency Chair, for the oversight and guidance, that has allowed us to dare to dream of a better urban future for all.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

I wish to share with you that I have been invited by the President of the General Assembly, to speak at a High Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Zero Waste which will take place on 30 March 2023 with the participation of the Secretary-General, among other dignitaries.

My loyalty is with the Executive Board, yet this High Level Meeting of the General Assembly presents a rare opportunity to further advocate for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and to position sustainable urbanization in the centre of stage.

I have discussed with the Chair and the Bureau of the Executive Board, that in order to attend this High Level Meeting, I will have to travel out tonight and will inevitably not be able to join in-person tomorrow. I assure you that I will connect to the Executive Board session virtually as soon as I land, which should be at around 2.30 in the afternoon tomorrow East Africa Time.

Mr Chairman, with your permission, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the presence of his Excellency Ambassador Michal Mlynar, the Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the United Nations in New York, who has joined us in person today as part of the delegation of the Slovak Republic to this session of the Executive Board. As you are aware by now, Ambassador Mlynar is our incoming Deputy Executive Director and I look forward to working with him at the earliest opportunity to serve you all.

Thank you, Excellencies. Please allow me to pass the floor back to the Chair.