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United Nations Human Settlements Programme
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Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

Report on the World Urban Forum

Report of the tenth session of the World Urban Forum: executive summary

Note by the secretariat

1. More than 13,000 attendees gathered in Abu Dhabi from 8 to 13 February 2020 for the tenth session of the World Urban Forum, under the patronage of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. Convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Forum is the world's premier United Nations-mandated conference on sustainable urban development. This was the first time the Forum had been held in the Arab region, allowing for a demonstration of Arab urbanism to inspire participants with examples of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements for all, with a strong cultural component.
2. Established by the United Nations in 2001, the World Urban Forum brings together leading urban actors to address the pressing issue of rapid urbanization and its impact on cities, communities, economies and the environment. The tenth session of the Forum was a significant event to kick-start the United Nations Decade of Action, which calls for accelerating sustainable solutions to the world's biggest challenges to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
3. The World Urban Forum, promoting the strong participation of stakeholders, has the following objectives: (a) to raise awareness of sustainable urbanization among stakeholders and constituencies, including the general public; (b) to improve collective knowledge of sustainable urbanization through inclusive open debates, the sharing of lessons learned and the exchange of best practices and good policies; (c) to increase coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system and with different stakeholders and constituencies for the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda¹ and the urban dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals; and (d) to provide substantive and strategic inputs from multilateral organizations, national and subnational governments and stakeholders to the reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.
4. Participants in the Forum included national, regional and local governments, parliamentarians, civil society, older persons, women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, grassroots groups, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, the private sector, foundations and philanthropic organizations, international and regional organizations, academia, professionals, and other relevant stakeholders.

* HSP/HA.2/1.

¹ General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex.

5. Creativity and cultural diversity have always been key drivers of urban success. At the tenth session of the World Urban Forum, for the first time, culture, creativity and innovation were at the heart of the global conversation about the liveability, vitality and sustainability of cities. The theme of the session, “Cities of opportunities: connecting culture and innovation”, recognized that culture is integral to addressing the challenges of urbanization and to achieving the New Urban Agenda.
6. As was affirmed by the Forum at its tenth session, culture is a vital component of local identity, including heritage, creativity and diversity. Urbanization needs to be planned, designed and managed to enhance culture. Indeed, culture can be considered as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.
7. The report of the tenth session of the World Urban Forum² details the scope and nature of participation by diverse stakeholders at the session. The report shares insights and recommendations, generated from more than 500 Forum events, including dialogues, round tables and special sessions, on creative ways of driving people-centred development that is inclusive, leaves no one behind, and mainstreams culture into strategic urban planning.
8. The tenth session of the Forum provided an innovative platform to highlight and advocate for innovative solutions to urban challenges. All the discussions, ideas and debates during the session were captured through submitted session reports. These detail state-of-the-art knowledge, innovation, implementation strategies and best practices in sustainable urban development while providing a quantitative mechanism to produce a database for the analysis of information.
9. The innovation-oriented solutions featured at the session can serve to guide cities and countries on the path to sustainable urban development. By engaging with the ideas, practices and knowledge shared during the session, urban actors had the opportunity to learn about ways of implementing the global urban agenda. The Forum also underscored the importance of sustainable urbanization. Unmanaged urbanization can exacerbate violence and lead to negative climate change impacts, environmental degradation, and social and economic polarization.
10. Real progress is being made in creating cities that are more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, yet more remains to be done to realize the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Challenges of extreme poverty, socioeconomic inequality, slums, social exclusion and marginalization, gender-based discrimination, humanitarian crises, conflict, air pollution, climate change and high unemployment persist. Dealing with these challenges requires innovation, serious commitments and massive action from a wide range of actors.
11. The tenth session of the World Urban Forum began with a call to action – a call for commitments to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants answered with the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions,³ a set of voluntary actions and diverse commitments by different partners and stakeholder groups to support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the Decade of Action. The Abu Dhabi Declared Actions also present a range of perspectives on the relationship between culture, innovation and cities, as well as solutions and best practices for the implementation of the urban elements of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.
12. Stakeholders that committed to taking action included international organizations, national, regional and local governments, civil society organizations, grassroots communities, youth associations and the private sector.
13. In the two years following the tenth session of the Forum, UN-Habitat continued to call for action and mobilization and tracked progress on the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions in the run-up to the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, held in Katowice, Poland, in 2022, to ensure that commitments made were implemented to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

² Available at <https://unhabitat.org/report-of-the-tenth-session-of-the-world-urban-forum>.

³ Available at www.urbanagendaplatform.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/WUF%2010%20final%20declared%20actions%20-%20FINAL.pdf.