

The second Assembly of UN Habitat, 5 – 9 June 2023

**Speech by the EU Permanent Representative Ms. Henriette Geiger, made on behalf
of the European Union and its Member States**

Madame Executive Director,

Honorable Chair of the Habitat Assembly,

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

I would like to start with expressing gratitude to the Executive Director, her team, to the UN Habitat CPR and Assembly Bureaus for all their work to prepare the second UN Habitat Assembly.

This Assembly comes at a propitious time. We are ahead of the review of SDG 11 by the High Level Political Forum and ahead of the SDG Summit. The Assembly has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in advancing sustainable urban development in this context.

For this, we have to focus on key priorities, to ensure swift and efficient implementation of the New Urban Agenda, contributing to the tangible progress on SDG implementation and addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

The EU remains committed to the SDG implementation; we will present our first SDG Voluntary review at the High Level Political Forum in New York.

We will continue to work with UN Habitat to effectively deliver on its mandate and will engage with all countries in assisting the organization to deliver, through increased efficiency, transparency and accountability.

In this regard, we commend your action, Madame Executive Director, to bring back the Organization to the path of financial sustainability.

Chair, Executive Director, Excellencies, the EU and its 27 Member States reiterate our commitment to uphold the rules-based international order, with the UN at its core.

We will, through the multilateral system, including UN Habitat, seek solutions to help rebuilding countries affected by natural disasters or by war. In this respect, we condemn the violation of the UN charter and express our unwavering support to Ukraine, its independence and its full territorial sovereignty.

We applaud the progress made last week at the OECPR, in finding a common ground on the resolutions, tabled for the Assembly. However, we need to remain mindful of resources constraints, when we adopt resolutions. The resolutions should reinforce the normative work that UN Habitat.

We welcome the resolutions calling for the development of international guidelines on People Centered Smart Cities and action to address biodiversity and resilience in cities, as well as progress on SDGs Localisation.

The EU and its Member States also support action on pollution prevention and celebration of the World Clean Up day. Finally, we appreciate the focus put on adequate and affordable housing.

We trust that the Declaration to be agreed by our Ministers should set the UN Habitat and Member States on the path for the better future with clear direction and focus.

We would like this Assembly to guide us on the development of the next Strategic Plan for 2026-2029 and to provide clear direction on the main priority areas that should be central in the new plan.

Also, the new Strategic Plan should serve us as a tool to mainstream climate, biodiversity and pollution prevention throughout the activities of the Program. A more focused strategic plan would help the organization to strengthen its position as the guardian of SDG 11.

Allow me to recall that the EU and its MS are supporting our commitment to deliver on sustainable urbanization, with substantial financial resources.

For 2021, the EU and its Member States' reported that collectively EUR 7.4 billion of their assistance corresponded to projects that contributed to implementation of SDG 11 in our partner countries.

With this, allow me to conclude and to wish everyone and all a very successful Assembly.

**Full Statement of the European Union and its Member States for the second UN
Habitat Assembly (5–9 June 2023)**

The year 2023 is of particular importance in accelerating the efforts to implement the UN New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, including at the local level. Halfway through the Decade for Action, the 2030 Agenda firmly remains our common framework for a sustainable future.

We now have to get our priorities and level of ambition right, to get back on track with its implementation and match the scale of the urbanization challenge. We need to accelerate the New Urban Agenda implementation with an integrated approach, global solidarity and cooperation.

With the review of SDG 11 by the High Level Political Forum in a few weeks and the SDG Summit taking place in September 2023, UN Habitat has an opportunity to exercise leadership within the UN system in advancing sustainable urban development and contributing to the implementation of a range of urban related SDGs.

To achieve this leadership, UN-Habitat needs to continue its efforts to increase efficiency, transparency and accountability. Furthermore, it is important to focus UN Habitat activities under its core mandate, to make them more impactful and without duplicating the work of other entities in the UN System. There is a need to reinforce the existing UN Habitat priorities.

The EU and its Member States appreciate the efforts of the Assembly to develop a robust Ministerial declaration that should set the path for UN Habitat and Member States for the future, in line with the New Urban Agenda. We consider it provides an important contribution by the UN-Habitat Assembly for the UN system and to the upcoming HLPF and the Summit of the Future.

We welcome the constructive and intensive negotiations held on the resolutions that took place during the OECPR week.

When adopting resolutions we should be mindful of budgetary and human resources constraints and reinforce the normative work that UN Habitat.

In particular, we welcome the resolutions calling for development of guidelines on Smart Cities and welcome action to address biodiversity, taking into account the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The EU and its Member States also see value in celebrating the World Clean Up day.

We also wish to express our support the UN Habitat work on Urban-Rural linkages, we encourage States and partners to take an integral part in these solutions. Urban and rural areas enjoy complementary assets and often form a continuum. Their territorial development integration is essential to face structural transformations and global challenges.

In this respect, we call for more consideration for urban and territorial development in the overall work of the United Nations.

Cities need to be strengthened in their role as key drivers of inclusive and sustainable development, and partnerships across levels of governance, involving as well civil society organisations, the private sector and citizens are more than ever essential.

To demonstrate the steps and efforts undertaken by the EU and its Member States, we will present this year at the UN High-level Political Forum our first EU SDG voluntary review. The EU Voluntary Review provides the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment as well as the importance of this shared global agenda, at a time when multilateralism is under pressure. We intend with this Review to demonstrate not only that we are active at home including at local level, but also that we are supporting our partners abroad.

This exercise will notably compile the most important commitments, measures and key initiatives regarding the implementation and acceleration of the delivery of SDG 11.

Looking outside the EU, we are providing very substantial support to our partner countries in the field of urban development. In 2021, the EU and its Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD specified that collectively EUR 7.4 billion of their assistance corresponded to projects that contributed to SDG 11 in our partner countries.

The EU with various Member States have for example provided support to sustainable urban mobility solutions in African metropolises – electric Bus Rapid Transit Systems, connecting people to jobs and opportunities while greening the cities and reducing climate gas emissions. We are supporting the mobilization of finance for urban infrastructure through the financing instruments – blending and guarantees – under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

The overall strategy shaping the EU external engagement is the Global Gateway, on which Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, has said: “We will support smart investments in quality infrastructure, respecting the highest social and environmental standards, in line with the EU’s values and standards. The Global Gateway strategy is a template for how Europe can build more resilient connections with the world.”

Cities will play an important role in realising the development potential of such more resilient connections with the world – it is in the cities that the majority of jobs are created, cities are central for the green transition. However, it matters how cities are planned, designed, built and financed - investments must be conceived and executed in context of integrated approaches to urban development.

Smart and inclusive urban development should also be guided by the human rights based approach and ensure the participation, inclusion and empowerment of all individuals, including the most vulnerable.

We see UN Habitat having a key role in supporting the broader framework for inclusive and sustainable urban development.

Moreover, the EU and its Member States stress the importance of localising the SDGs, for supporting the implementation at all territorial levels, facilitating peer learning between regions and cities at global level and encouraging a greater engagement in Voluntary Local Reviews.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to bring up today a very significant point which relates to the future of Ukraine. We take note of UN-Habitat's efforts to mobilise an ad hoc Ukraine Crisis Response Taskforce that was able to identify opportunities of engagement. The EU together with partners such as the G7, the G20 and other multilateral partners and international financial institutions will assist Ukraine to prepare a strategic reconstruction plan which outlines key reforms and investments necessary to build a prosperous and sustainable future for Ukraine.

Complementing EU's actions, a number of EU Member States are actively engaged in assisting urban reconstruction and planning in Ukraine, both on a national level, and in specific cities within the national guidelines. We also take this opportunity to express the full solidarity of the EU and its Member States' with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

The EU is keen to ensure that the multilateral system is not another victim of this war of aggression. We are committed to upholding the rules-based international order, with the UN at its core, and to working through the multilateral system, to empower it as a forum for seeking solutions and rebuilding peace.

Finally, looking at the implementation of our common compass which is the New Urban Agenda, we wish to recall the presentation of 6 Voluntary commitments by the EU and its Member States made one year ago to respond to the new sense of urgency expressed to resolutely move sustainable urban development forward.

The recent and successful Union for the Mediterranean Urban Ministerial Conference and the adopted Ministerial declaration also stressed the continued collective political support to the ongoing implementation process of the UfM Urban Agenda, which is supported by the EU and now articulated around two dedicated action plans respectively on urban development and housing.

The EU and its Member States are confident that this UN-Habitat Assembly will contribute to the acceleration of the delivery of the New Urban Agenda. We are fully committed to constructive conclusion of the Ministerial Declaration and we encourage UN Habitat to continue its efforts and progress with regards to the implementation of JIU recommendations.