

United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat)
EXECUTIVE BOARD
Third Session
November 28-30, 2023

U.S. Statements

United States National Statement

Thank you, Chair. Madame Executive Director, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and stakeholders.

The United States would like to start by expressing our sincere gratitude to Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif for your leadership during the past six years. Through your leadership and in cooperation with the Executive Board, UN-Habitat has made important strides in addressing increasingly pressing challenges facing urban communities worldwide. A successful second UN-Habitat Assembly and UN-Habitat's return to solvency are just two of the important achievements that occurred during your tenure, and they demonstrate that you are leaving UN-Habitat in a better state than you found it. We thank you for your service and dedication in support of the goals of this agency and join member states in recognizing the valuable contributions you have made.

We have no doubt UN-Habitat will continue to play a key role in the work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and specifically SDG 11, for sustainable cities and communities. The United States remains committed to collaborating on this fundamental goal and supports and applauds UN-Habitat's leadership in this area.

We welcome in particular UN-Habitat's efforts to implement the resolutions on housing and smart communities adopted during the second UN Habitat Assembly. UN-Habitat's work will contribute greatly to our collective efforts to build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable cities.

We are reminded of the critical importance of UN-Habitat's life-saving work in countries, areas, and territories affected by disaster and conflict. This could not be more relevant as we witness the effects of the conflicts in Gaza resulting from Hamas' terrorism. We are also witnessing the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and destruction of civilian infrastructure. We commend and support UN-Habitat's important efforts in helping communities affected by conflict and disaster begin to rebuild in a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable manner.

UN-Habitat's strategic plan exemplifies the power of collective action to address and develop solutions to challenges faced by urban communities. We, as member states, must continue to strengthen UN-Habitat's ability to carry out its mandate to create resilient and sustainable cities and improve the quality of life within urban areas and human settlements.

Thank you.

Agenda item 4

- The United States takes note of the Board of Auditors Report and UN-Habitat Financial Statement for 2022. We are pleased to note the significant increase in total foundation non-earmarked revenue for 2022. We also take note that the BOA report indicates that UN Habitat’s financial indicators remain sound.
- The United States is concerned that implementation of audit recommendations remains at a low level and has shown to be a continuing issue for UN-Habitat. We encourage UN-Habitat to increase efforts to address all BOA recommendations – especially the 48 percent of outstanding recommendations that are over three years old.
- The United States appreciates the presentation of the scalability model and looks forward to its implementation in 2024 after applying ACABQ recommended refinements. We request the model be referenced in the 2024 BOA comparison of actual to budget.
- The United States also takes note of improvements in financial management at UN-Habitat as evidenced by the improving current and solvency ratios.

Additional Questions:

- *The report mentions the board found inconsistent procedures for allocating unearmarked funds originally contributed as earmarked funding – has this been resolved?*
- *What is the status of UN Habitat's progress on the BOA recommendations regarding financial and project management?*

Agenda item 5:

- The United States can support the proposed program of work for UN-Habitat.
- The United States notes the UN-Habitat's efforts to return the core budget to solvency and reiterates the Committee’s recommendations that UN-Habitat continue to strengthen its efforts on resource mobilization and outreach activities with a view to increasing non-earmarked and the “soft-earmarked” contributions.
- The United States commends UN-Habitat's work to create realistic budgets aligned with the actual voluntary contributions received from Member States.

- The United States notes the ACABQ report and supports its call for UN-Habitat to implement outstanding recommendations from the Board or Auditors, including the recommendation to develop a policy and establish a mechanism to ensure program support rates are in line with UN policy and that exceptions are properly reviewed and approved.
- Could UN Habitat please provide the Board with an expected timeline to fully implement the outstanding recommendations of the Board of Auditors?

Agenda item 6:

- The United States takes note of the Due Diligence Assessment Report as reviewed by the Risk Oversight and Advisory Committee.
- The United States believes in a one-year trial basis for the Foundation, and looks forward to the regular EB reporting on the Sustainable Human Settlements Foundation.

Question to raise:

- When will the secretariat provide an update on implementation of the committee recommendations?

Agenda item 7:

- The United States appreciates the presentation of the report analyzing the principal obstacles to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, as requested by the Executive Board at its first session of 2023.
- We appreciate UN Habitat's central role of supporting Member States in addressing obstacles in mainstreaming the New Urban Agenda and commend their efforts and commitment.
- We strongly believe any funding decisions augmenting UN-Habitat's work on New Urban Agenda implementation must be taken in the context of its entire mandate, given resource constraints.

Agenda item 8:

- The United States takes note of the report and the proposed roadmap.

- Regarding the Strategic Plan 2026-29, will the Secretariat present estimated costs for each of the resolutions adopted at the second United Nations Habitat Assembly (June 2023), as well as relevant General Assembly resolutions?
- The United States will actively participate in the MOPAN assessment of UN-Habitat and encourages other member states to do the same.
- The United States commends UN-Habitat for adopting results-based management principles and a knowledge-based approach for the Strategic Plan. Could the Secretariat elaborate on how these approaches will be implemented?
- The United States is also looking forward to learning more from the Secretariat regarding the concrete guidance on how to ensure better monitoring and reporting on project delivery and impact in connection with the Strategic Plan.

Agenda item 9:

- The U.S. welcomes the innovative approach and supports the establishment of the urban action funding window as a mechanism to address financing gaps for UN-Habitat Assembly resolutions.
- The U.S. stresses the importance of continued effective governance and oversight mechanisms for all funding related work including the urban action funding window and maintains that the oversight function for funding decisions within UN-Habitat should reside with the Executive Board.
- The U.S. joins in encouraging member states in continuing the work begun at the Assembly in developing this initiative and to consider contributing to the funding window to support the implementation of critical UN-Habitat resolutions

Agenda item 10:

- The United States welcomes the development of guidelines to address the growing demand for smart community approaches to service delivery and good governance.
- The United States supports the two main components of this effort: global practices and lessons and inclusive consultations. We encourage the Executive Board to conduct due diligence to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are consulted and that the focus of the framework for smart communities is driven by an understanding of what will improve the lives of people across the globe.

- As with many initiatives, the availability of resources determines the extent to which this initiative can be fully implemented. We would welcome an update on the current level of funding and its implications for the implementation of this initiative.
- The complexity of the consultations is a significant aspect of this work and requires extensive time and resources to ensure that the topic of smart cities is focused. The United States understands this dynamic and cautions partners to be systematic and strategic about how to proceed. Without clear objectives, the process runs the risk of losing focus.
- Finally, the rigorous timeline can be achieved if the two other factors (funding and comprehensive consultations) are maintained.
- We look forward to this exciting opportunity to help improve our cities and the people who inhabit them.

Agenda item 11:

- The United States welcomes the update from the UN-Habitat Secretariat about the progress made on the Sustainable Development Goals Cities flagship initiative which responds to the need to accelerate action on the local implementation of SDGs during this Decade of Action. We thank his excellency the Ambassador of Egypt for the presentation on the SURGe initiative.
- We recognize the importance of collecting data and using it to support investments in sustainable development and inform public policy especially as it relates to the SDGs. We also understand the motivation to collect this data through a certification process.
- The United States appreciates the findings of the SDG Cities follow-up report that states:
 - (a) Not all city governments are aware of the Sustainable Development Goals, their benefit globally and locally, and the significance of the role of cities in achieving them;
 - (b) Not all city governments are motivated to go beyond their immediate tasks and engage in the implementation of global agendas; and
 - (c) Not all city governments are aware of the guidance of the New Urban Agenda for achieving sustainable development locally, or practical steps to translate this guidance into action and impact.

- Previously, we asked for more specific costs of the SDG Cities certification program. We appreciate the tiered system of technical assistance that UN-Habitat and donors can provide to interested cities. While we understand the SDG Cities consists of various modes of engagement and coordination, including the Cities Hub. The United States believes we can make this process more fit for purpose for participating cities by adapting the model to national and subnational contexts and increasing flexibility for cities to develop their own approaches based on their capabilities and resources.
- However, given the nascent nature of this revised system, the United States requests that the cost structure be closely monitored to determine the viability and adaption of these modes so as to ensure that cities are benefiting fully from their financial investments.
- This is critical because we believe that understanding the benefit to each participating city is as important as achieving the SDGs. In other words, given that there is a cost associated with this engagement, it is critical that cities understand the return on this investment, which will be a motivator for continued focus on SDG 11 and work to address global development needs.
- Thank you for the efforts on this and we look forward to further conversations.

Agenda item 12:

- The United States continues to be a strong proponent of the World Urban Forum and supports the revised main objectives of the revised program design.
- The United States thanks the Egyptian government as hosts of the World Urban Forum and we look forward to having a strong presence at the 12th Session to be held from November 4 –to the 8th, 2024 in Cairo.
- The United States supports WUF12’s theme direction of the “Localization of the SDGs” and looks forward to the timely release of the background paper, as well as information on the main sessions.
- To ensure transparent, inclusive, effective, and timely preparation, as well as strong participation from Member States and stakeholders, the United States urges UN Habitat to make timely announcements on the programming including side events.
- We encourage clarity on hybrid and streaming capabilities for all sessions at the time of calls for proposals.

Agenda item 13:

- Thank you Chair. Thank you Madame Executive Director for the update and to the Secretariat for the Brief, The United States commends UN-Habitat's continued efforts to support and contribute to [UN] development system reform.
- We appreciate UN-Habitat's commitment to aligning its planning cycle with the QCPR.
- It is important that UN-Habitat's work be aligned with UN development priorities established in consultation with the relevant member states.
- We are supportive of UN-Habitat's efforts to address the multidimensional challenges to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals utilizing whole-system solutions and responses.
- We are confident that UN-Habitat will continue to play a leading role in the implementation of United Nations development system reform.

Agenda item 14 and 15:

- What are the Secretariat's plans to share the OIOS midterm evaluation of UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2020-23 when it is complete early next year?
 - Can the Secretariat update the Board on actions taken regarding Case No 0677/22, in which a UN-Habitat staff member submitted a forged attestation letter to a bank to support their personal loan application and any preventative measures moving forward?
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- The United States strongly supports strengthening the independence of the Ethics Office. An independent Ethics Office is the key to a fit for purpose ethics policy that discourages and eliminates all forms of misconduct, ensures transparency and accountability, and protects whistleblowers from retaliation.
 - The United States commends UN-Habitat for having 100% compliance with the Financial Disclosure Program and the filing of financial disclosure statements.

- Regarding the statistics on cases as cited in the report, can the Secretariat provide requests for services specific to UN-Habitat regarding protection against retaliation and financial misconduct?
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- The United States notes that the Ethics Panel held eleven formal sessions in 2022. Can the Secretariat provide information on the subject and actions taken in these sessions?
- Can the Secretariat update the Executive Board on its work with ENMO?

Agenda item 16:

- We take note of UN Habitat Assembly decision 2/5, but would like to request the Secretariat to elaborate on when the Assembly could discuss clarifying the distinct roles and responsibilities of each of the governing bodies of UN-Habitat to address the concerns of the JIU?
- The United States supports recommendation 2 and notes the same recommendation appears in the UN BOA report. We also note UN Habitat has proposed a realistic budget in line with contributions received from the previous year. We also note UN Habitat's proposal to adjust its budget based on actual or projected contributions received. We support the flexible approach provided revised budgets are submitted to the Board for approval.
- The United States notes recommendation 3, and while the United States does not oppose development of a scale, we note that use of a voluntary indicative scale by other programs, such as UNEP, has historically had limited benefits. U.S. law does not recognize indicative scales as a type of contribution, so we do request that the United States not be included in the scale which is consistent with our policy with respect to the indicative scale employed by UNEP.
- Could the Secretariat say more about when recommendation 5, the development of a corporate risk register, will be fully implemented? How does MACS oversight fulfill the role of the risk register? Is there an agreement between DMSPC and the Secretariat for the secondment of an expert to help develop the risk register? The United States strongly supports this recommendation. A risk register is an essential tool in ensuring risks are properly catalogued, assessed, and monitored.
- Could the Secretariat share the details of the implementation of recommendation 7 with the Board, along with any PBIs associated with its implementation?

Agenda item 17:

- The U.S. welcomes efforts of the Secretariat, through this survey, to evaluate the effectiveness of UN-Habitat sessions and to improve the process and outcome of future UN-Habitat sessions. We encourage all board members to respond to this survey after every Executive Board meeting.
- For the secretariat, will there be suggestions made to the Executive Board or applications based on the survey?

Agenda item 19: Other matters

- The United States reiterates its strong support for the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Development of a Stakeholder engagement policy.
- Portugal as the new chair can count on our constructive participation in the development and finalization of this policy.
- Civil society organizations embody grassroots commitment to UN principles, ensuring that our policies resonate with those we serve.
- Participation of civil society is aligned with the UN's own guidance on protecting and promoting civic space, which is essential for fulfilling the organization's mandates across peace and security, development, climate change, and human rights.
- Excluding civil society voices undermines the UN's commitment to diversity and inclusivity.
- Practical implementation of UN resolutions is often driven by civil society, making their participation crucial for effective action.
- Complex global challenges necessitate the broad, cross-sectoral expertise that civil society uniquely provides.
- Accordingly, we would also like to recall the remarks of the esteemed Chair during discussion of agenda item 3, in which the Chair expressed concern about the exclusion of two organizations recommended by the Executive Director for participation in the second UN Habitat Assembly.
- We share these concerns, especially in light of UN-Habitat Governing Council decision 19/8, which states: “the Executive Director shall submit the list of [ad hoc accredited] partners to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for approval on a no-objection basis **by final decision of the Committee.**”
- We recall no discussion of objections to the participation of any stakeholders recommended by the Executive Director in the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and look forward to a written explanation on what occurred that member states requested during the November 2 meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group.
- We would welcome an update on when the secretariat will fulfill this request.

United States Right of Reply (as delivered, November 29, 2023)

We regret that one intervention neglected to recognize that this crisis — and its terrible consequences for both Israelis and Palestinians and the cities in which they live — began with the barbaric terrorist attack that Hamas carried out against Israel on October 7th, which we have condemned and will continue to condemn. We also call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas and other armed groups.

The United States condemns the actions of Hamas and upholds the right of Israel to defend itself against terrorism.

Of course, Palestinian civilians are not to blame for Hamas’s atrocities or for the grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza. They are its victims. As with civilians in any conflict, the lives of Palestinian civilians must be protected.

As President Biden has said, it is not just Israel but also the “Palestinian people [who] deserve a state of their own and a future free from Hamas.” “A two-state solution is the only way to ensure the long-term security of both the Israeli and Palestinian people.”

And as we think ahead, we know that any future plans for Gaza must include a sustained mechanism for reconstruction in Gaza’s cities and a pathway to Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in states of their own, with equal measures of security, freedom, opportunity, and dignity. We believe UN-Habitat is playing and will continue to play an important role in this process.

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