



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
UNHabitat-SGB@un.org | www.unhabitat.org

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

**Briefing to Member States by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat on the
Implementation of the Second Session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly
(UNHA2)**

1 September 2023

Conference room 4 at UNON

Distinguished delegates

Mr Michal Mlynar, Deputy Executive Director

Colleagues,

Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and gentlemen,

1.0 Good morning, good afternoon and good evening. Welcome back to those who have been away on a much deserved summer vacation. Let me begin by thanking all Member States for the very strong support at the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly. 149 countries participated including 54 ministers and 27 vice ministers. We had a total number of 4,703 participants, out of which 1,508 were from national governments. Once again, my appreciation to the Government of Kenya, our host country, the Director-General of UNON and her staff for their facilitation.

2.0 We have worked throughout the summer to complete the Post Session documents including the Proceedings of UNHA2. You have with you the English advanced version.

Excellencies

3.0 At UNHA2, you approved 10 resolutions including the ministerial declaration highlighting that we need effective multilateralism to ensure better global cooperation to achieve sustainable urbanisation. In his most recent speech at the BRICS meeting in South Africa, the Secretary-General reminded us that the world is now multipolar. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; to have peace and development, we need to have meaningful multilateralism. This is important as the climate crisis has clearly boiled over with intense heat, fires and floods in all regions of the world. Let me take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the African Union and the Government of Kenya for hosting the African Climate Summit that will start on 3 September. It is both timely and needed as the world's fastest urbanising continent balances between development and sustainability.

4.0 Throughout the summer, I have been busy bringing the positive message from UNHA2 to all the global platforms where I had the opportunity to be invited. Almost immediately after UNHA2, I addressed the second G7 Sustainable Urban Development Ministers Meeting in Takamatsu, Japan. According to the communique of the meeting, the ministers confirmed “basic principles, such as on the pursuit of sustainability and public-private partnerships, as well as promotion of international common understanding of the importance of urban policies for “sustainable urban development” among G7 countries that share values such as achieving carbon neutrality, ensuring resilience, and utilizing digital technologies to solve urban issues”. This was following an opportunity last year to speak at the G7 platform in Potsdam and, later this week, at the African Climate Summit and the G77 meeting in Cuba. What resounded well with the G7 member states, was UNHA2’s resolutions on adequate and affordable housing; climate adaptation and financing of sustainable infrastructure. Just as in the rest of the world, there is no doubt that ‘housing for all’ and the right to adequate housing is a key concern in the advanced economies of the world too.

5.0 Earlier in July, UN-Habitat presented the global synthesis report on progress with SDG#11 at the High Level Political Forum in New York. As you know, there is no progress and stagnation for 30% of the SDG targets. The implementation rate of SDG11, which is cross-cutting, is alarming- the chances of not achieving SDG 11 by 2030 are very high. Only two of the SDG11 indicators have 50-75% of progress been achieved. As an example, in terms of improving inadequate housing conditions, only one region fully met the SDG 11 indicator on slums. While there are some slight improvements in terms of SDG 11 data, we remain really far behind. We have produced a booklet of the key facts and figures for your reference.

6.0 While participating in the HLPF in New York, I met with many Permanent Representatives to the United Nations to brief them on the outcomes of the UNHA2. They were pleased that the United Nations Habitat Assembly in June 2023 took forward the commitments of the General Assembly high-level meeting in April 2022 by developing the areas of action on housing, climate, crisis, localization, and financing into resolutions. And that these resolutions offer policy guidance to national governments and strategic direction to the UN-Habitat Secretariat to assist countries accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The overriding impression of Permanent Representatives with whom I met was that the United Nations Habitat Assembly is well on its way to becoming the preeminent intergovernmental platform for global urban policy.

Distinguished delegates,

7.0 As I said in New York, we need a Paris Agreement on Housing. Just as the 2015 treaty transformed climate change diplomacy, we need a global set of indicators to guide nationally determined actions (NDAs) to fill the growing gap in access to adequate housing. Reaching this target alone can bring us back on track to achieve SDG11. I believe that all the SDG11-related indicators are inter-linked with the provision of adequate and affordable housing. By putting housing at the centre, whether through the provision of shelter for refugees in Kalobayei here in Kenya or the provision of housing as a climate adaptation action in Sao Tome & Principe, we are addressing all the rudiments of SDG#11 including integrated planning, upgrading of basic services, public transport and we can turbo-charge job creation; all of which helps improve living conditions at the local level. A lot has been achieved but we need to be more ambitious. We need to double our efforts not only at the national level but with better coordination at the sub-regional and local levels.

8.0 To meet the level of ambition set for us in the Ministerial Declaration at UNHA2, we must all recognise that we have our responsibilities to fulfil. For us at UN-Habitat, we have been focusing on making this organisation fit for purpose. Our tireless efforts to reform the agency are familiar to you. As of 31 July, the total funds received from Member States and donors is USD 72.3 million. We are still lagging behind in core contributions. To date, we have received only USD 1.8 million for the foundation non-earmarked fund from 19 Member States. We look forward to providing a more updated set of figures at the Executive Board meeting in November.

9.0 All of this brings me to the preparations that we are doing to ensure that all the resolutions approved by Member States at the United Nations Habitat Assembly, both in 2019 and 2023, have the best chance of being implemented. Let me assure all of you that we are not forgetting those resolutions approved by the Governing Council and the General Assembly. We will be tracking them as well. In fact, when supporting Member States with the formulation of the resolutions you approved at UNHA2, we have ensured that we provided information about past resolutions and commitments.

10.0 I wish to highlight that I have set up a Task Team headed by my Deputy Executive Director to oversee the implementation of the resolutions beginning immediately and continuing under the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan Extension of the period of 2024-2025. The Task Team comprises focal points at the senior level, who will be responsible for integrating the resolutions into the four domains of change much as the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the eve of UNHA2 clustered the resolutions into four subgroups for the purposes of consultation and drafting. These encompass housing and slum transformation to reduce poverty and inequality (SP1), urban planning, people-centered smart cities, and sustainable financing to advance urban prosperity (SP2), urban resilience, climate change and biodiversity to promote climate action and environmental sustainability (SP3), urban recovery frameworks to support crisis reduction and recovery (SP4), and SDG localization as a cross-cutting enabling strategy. Within this framework of the Strategic Plan, the Task Team will develop action plans for each of the resolutions as well as an over-arching resource mobilisation strategy, communications plan, and monitoring mechanism. As you know, implementing the Strategic Plan Extension 2024-2025 including updating progress on the resolutions is a standing item in the Executive Board meeting.

11.0 As you will see in the UNHA2 Proceedings, some resolutions have tasks that are more time-bound. The resolution on people centred smart cities, for example, calls upon the Executive Director to develop global guidelines to be submitted to the Executive Board and thenceforth to the resumed second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly in 2025. Fortunately, we have several Member States supporting the implementation of this resolution. I thank Argentina, Botswana, Cameroon, Costa Rica, France, Germany, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia and the United States for their support and guidance. France has also pledged USD 311K, which starts the ball rolling for the \$1.2million required to deliver the global guidelines in an inclusive manner.

12.0 In the example of this resolution, we have 22 months to develop the global guidelines. My team have worked tirelessly throughout the summer to ensure that we are able to issue the call for the nomination of experts, which I hope will be able to convene virtually in November this year. Each Member State can nominate a maximum of two experts as focal points. Based on a set of criteria taking into account area of expertise, I will select 30 global experts to provide advisory and feedback as the secretariat drafts the global guidelines. With the help of the regional groups, we also plan to host virtual regional meetings. As envisioned in the resolution, there will be three global expert group meetings, two in 2024 and one in the first quarter of 2025. The bidding documents to host the global EGMs are available online and will reach all Member States through the Secretary of Governing Bodies later this week.

13.0 In another example, I would like to reassure all Member States that the roadmap to develop the next UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2026-29 is already underway. The team presented this draft roadmap to the Programme Management Committee last week. Currently, the Office of Investigation Oversight Services (OIOS) is conducting an evaluation of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, which as you know has been extended by a further two years. We will also be reviewed by MOPAN at the end of the year. All this provides invaluable inputs to the making of the next Strategic Plan. As most UN agencies will be developing their strategic plans at the same time, I would like to assure Member States that we will be actively engaging the UN System and stakeholders throughout the process.

14.0 Like both these resolutions, our team has reviewed the projected budget implication (PBI) for all the other resolutions. If you recall, to support Member States, the Secretariat provided PBIs for each of the resolutions. We have since re-calibrated the figures based on the approved language by Member States in the UNHA2 Report. What we are proposing is a scalability approach whereby we identify available resources, what are recurring costs and what are one-off activities that are attractive to specific donors. In short, what we can do with what we have; what we need to deliver consistently; and what will be good to have if there is more resources!

15.0 I will not be going through each of the resolutions at this briefing session. My deputy is here with me together with the task team members. Suffice it to say that for each of the resolutions, the Secretariat has prepared the following components: (I) A clear roadmap & action plan from July 2023 to June 2025 as part of the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan Extension; (ii) Projected budget implications; (iii) Preparatory baseline studies to enable monitoring; (iv) Theory of change to ensure alignment with the current Strategic Plan; and (v) Cross-cutting support services including the resource mobilisation strategy, communications plan, and monitoring support.

16.0 Funding alone will not help us implement these resolutions. We also need your political support and guidance. I am delighted that 53 Member States have joined the Group of Friends of UN-Habitat, Sustainable Urbanisation and the New Urban Agenda. My hope is that the same Nairobi spirit of effective multilateralism will prevail in this implementation phase following UNHA2. I believe Member States will continue to be interested in all the resolutions and contribute to the foundation non-earmarked fund of UN-Habitat. Without adequate core funding, it will be impossible for the Secretariat to support each and every resolution equally.

Distinguished Delegates,

17.0 The Climate and Urbanization resolution also calls for a continuation of the Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change at the Climate Change COPs. I am happy to announce that UN-Habitat will support the COP28 Presidency of the United Arab Emirates in hosting the second iteration of the meeting at COP28 in Dubai. Building on the success of the first-ever Ministerial Meeting held at COP27, the upcoming Ministerial Meeting will focus on how to accelerate local climate finance by facilitating a dialogue between Ministers of Housing, Urban Development, Environment and Finance as well as local and regional governments, multilateral banks and other non-state actors.

This Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change will be a curtain raiser of the thematic day on Multilevel Action, Urbanization, Built Environment and Transport at COP28, which will take place in the first week of COP28 on 06 December 2023. A note verbal to our line ministries and further information will follow in due time. I look forward to seeing you in Dubai at this milestone event.

18.0 Let me also take this opportunity to announce that UN-Habitat's Local 2030 Coalition work has been selected by the Secretary-General as a high impact initiative in the SDG Summit, which will take place later this month at the 78 session of the General Assembly in New York. UN-Habitat is the focal point for the Local 2030 initiative, which is regarded as an enabler. Our main deliverable is to exemplify and strengthen how socio-economic and environmental transitions central to the achievement of the SDGs are taking root at local and sub-national levels. I am heartened to let you know that we are currently working directly in 578 cities, in all regions and serving well-over an estimated 600 million people. Please support our campaign, 1000 Cities 1 billion Lives, with focus areas such as climate action, biodiversity, resilience, housing, slum transformation, better crisis recovery, financing sustainable urban development; all thematic areas that you have endorsed at UNHA2.

Distinguished delegates,

19.0 Please allow me to acknowledge that Azerbaijan will also be hosting the global observance of World Habitat Day on 2 October in Baku. I will also be presenting the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour to five awardees in Baku during World Habitat Day. I welcome all of you to urge your capitals to observe WHD at the national level.

20.0 A big thank you to the Government of Turkiye for hosting the global observance of World Cities Day in Uskudar, Istanbul on 31 October. I appreciate the continued support of Turkiye in their contribution toward the work of the Zero Waste secretariat, which is jointly implemented by UN-Habitat and UNEP. This is complementary to the World Clean Up resolution at UNHA2, which we look forward to implementing with a kick-off initiative in the United States later this month.

21.0 Let me also thank the Government of China for their support for the inaugural Shanghai Award for Sustainable Development in Cities, which will be celebrated in Shanghai on 26 October. Let me also recognise Dubai Municipality and the United Arab Emirates for once again supporting the Dubai Awards for Best Practices. Throughout October, please do link your urban activities by registering them on the Urban October website. The theme of Urban October 2023, book-ended by World Habitat Day and World Cities Day, is financing sustainable urbanisation. As the Secretary-General said, without adequate and equitable financing, we cannot achieve the SDGs in all regions equitably.

22.0 In closing, I wish to take this opportunity to mention that I have been in touch with the Executive Office of the Secretary General. They have informed me that the Secretary-General will be announcing at the SDG Summit the establishment of the Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments and requested UN-Habitat to serve as the Secretariat. The Advisory Group will comprise representatives of 15 local and regional governments and 5 national governments for a period of one year. The purpose of the Advisory Group will be to identify opportunities to strengthen multilevel governance and engage local governments in intergovernmental and national planning processes.

With that, distinguished delegates, I thank you for your attention. We stand ready to answer any questions you have for us.