

## **Regional Groups Consultations**

2 to 3 April 2024

### **Africa Region, Tuesday, 2 April 2024, 09:00-10:30**

#### Talking Point for the Acting Executive Director

#### **The proposed Agenda**

1. Opening of the meeting by the Chair of the Regional Group; **(Chair of Group)**
2. Welcoming remarks by the Acting Executive Director;
3. Summary by the Secretariat on preparations and expectations for the first session of the Executive Board (**SGB**) and brief update on the work of UN-Habitat in the region **(RPD)**;
4. Tour de table of attending Member States on their expectations for the upcoming session of the Executive Board and general comments; **(led by Chair of Group)**
5. Any other matters, including closing remarks. **(led by Chair of Group)**

#### **Agenda item 2: Welcoming remarks by the Acting Executive Director**

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Good morning to all of you. I warmly welcome you to this year's regional groups consultations.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on UN-Habitat's collective efforts since 2023, acknowledge challenges we have encountered and set our sights on the road ahead.

As you are well aware, in January 2024, our former Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, departed, leaving a remarkable legacy from her six years of being at the helm of UN-Habitat, steering the organization from a financial deficit for nearly 12 years to generating a surplus for the last consecutive two years. She positioned UN-Habitat as a thought leader on sustainable urbanization and local action, accelerating the local delivery of the SDGs through key mechanisms such as the SG's Task Force on the Future of Cities, the Local2030 Coalition and our projects implementation on ground. We are now in a transition period until our new Executive Director is appointed. In this period, I continue to hold the fort with my full commitment towards building strong diplomatic and political support for UN-Habitat's mandate and strengthening partnerships. I am also deeply involved in steering our organization towards better delivery and success, through reprioritization and improving resources of the organization.

In the last session of UN-Habitat's Executive Board in November 2023, four decisions were adopted related to financial and administrative matters of UN-Habitat; the implementation of normative, operational and other programmatic activities; the implementation of outcomes from the 2nd UN-Habitat Assembly, including the upcoming Strategic Plan; and the 2024 workplan of the Executive Board.

The next Executive Board meeting will be held in May 2024, for which preparations are already underway. Themes that will be covered include the draft work programme and budget for 2025, the upcoming Strategic Plan 2026-2029, but also updates on the recent resolutions, as well as preparations for our 12<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum.

I also wanted to give you another update: Recently, two major evaluations and assessments have been conducted about UN-Habitat's work. The OIOS is conducting a mid-term evaluation of UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2020-2025, which started after the UN-Habitat Assembly approved the extension of the Strategic Plan up to 2025. An inception report was submitted to UN-Habitat last July, and preliminary findings were shared with UN-Habitat staff for review. This process is now just concluding, and the findings, lessons and recommendations will be presented to the first session of UN-Habitat Executive Board in May 2024. We look forward to briefing our Member States on this in more detail.

The assessment by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessment of UN-Habitat is ongoing, with a planned completion date of November 2024. MOPAN is composed of 22 Member States who provide almost 90% of total multilateral funding globally. Their assessments are used to assist in reporting and decision-making on their national investments. This MOPAN assessment of UN-Habitat is led by Spain and Germany and assisted by external assessors. The draft inception report was recently circulated internally for comments. The MOPAN team recently concluded their data collection phase, after visiting us in Nairobi earlier this year, focusing on our performance on strategic and operational management and results. For us, this assessment is a critical rating process with significant impact on our programmes and resource mobilization, ensuring that our work is guided by evidence, accountability and continuous learning.

You will also be glad to hear that we have made progress on our regional structure aiming to further align our regional architecture with the UN regional reform at regional and country levels, to get it ready for Strategic Plan 2026-2029, to strengthen internal coordination and accountability, and to mobilize more sustainable resources for the regions. With that said and thanks to the continuous effort from all colleagues, a Reinvigorated Regional Architecture was presented and endorsed by our Executive Committee this January. A reorganized Headquarter coordination section within the Regional Programme Division, a new Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, a new UN-Habitat Europe Coordination Hub, and a subregional multi-country structure in several regions have been introduced, as well as several new country offices opened, or opening, around the world.

Lastly, this is also our year of the World Urban Forum, with the theme “It All Starts at Home: Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities”. A major focus at WUF12, taking place in Cairo in November, will be to translate global urban change ideals into tangible, localized actions, by fostering practical transformations within cities and communities. We have opened general registrations on the website recently, including a call for hosting partner-led events, and so far, the interest has been tremendous. This may become the largest WUF yet, which is why I would like to encourage Member States to mobilize support from your respective Governments and ensure adequate representation from your Government’s leadership at this year’s World Urban Forum, which will see Heads of State, Prime Ministers and Ministers from our line Ministries attend this crucial global urban event.

**Agenda item 3: Summary by the Secretariat on preparations and expectations for the first session of the Executive Board (SGB)** and brief update on the work of UN-Habitat in the region ;

Excellencies,

As you are all aware the first session of the Executive Board for the year 2024 will be held for three days from 6 to 8 May 2024, fully in person here in Gigiri.

With the support and guidance from the Bureau, **the preparations** for the session have advanced.

We sent out the Convocation note to Member States in the month of February to ensure that delegations save the dates for the session and to take note of the agenda. More recently on 22 March 2024, we sent out the formal Notification and Provisional Agenda for the session in the six official UN languages as required by Rule 3 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Board.

We have also focused on preparing all the necessary pre-session documents and the translation of those documents is being finalized this week with the expectation that they will be shared with you on 8 April 2024, four weeks prior to the session in line with the rules of procedure.

We have also opened the online registration for the session, and we invite delegations to duly register for the session and in addition send us the official lists of the respective delegations by 2 May2024.

Excellencies

With regards to the **expectations for the session**, as you can probably already tell from the provisional Agenda which you have received, this upcoming session will be more of updates to Member States on various items including the status of the draft work program and budget for 2025, the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat, the preparation of the strategic plan 2026 to 2029, and WUF 12, among others. For these updates, the Executive Board may take note and make any recommendations accordingly.

There are, however, one or two matters on which we would require specific guidance in the form of concrete decisions from the Executive Board.

One is on the implementation of Resolution 2/7 of the United Nations Habitat Assembly on “Adequate housing for all”. An update on this resolution will be provided to the Executive Board as part of the agenda item on update on all resolution adopted by the UN-Habitat Assembly. Specifically, as requested by the UN-Habitat Assembly, the Executive Board is required to decide on the date and agenda for the first session of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Adequate Housing for All.

At the upcoming session, the Executive Board will also need to consider one of the three options being presented to operationalize the SURGe initiative in line with the request by the UN-Habitat Assembly in Resolution 2/5 on “Enhancing the interlinkage between urbanization and climate change resilience”. Resolution 2/5 expects “the Executive Director to inform the Executive Board, and subsequently develop options and recommendations for operationalizing the SURGe initiative as a meaningful institutional arrangement for the Executive Board to consider”.

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

To enhance the preparations for the session and deliberations on the possible outcomes of the session, we have already prepared the technical inputs into the proposed draft outcomes of the session to be shared with Member States today. The informal consultations on the draft outcomes will be held by the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters from 8 April 2024. That working group, as you are aware, has already held several meetings which have covered some of the substantive items to be considered by the Executive Board and this will help with the informal consultations prior to the session. In this regard let me touch very briefly on the implementation of resolutions adopted by the UN-Habitat Assembly as well as the next strategic plan for the period 2026 to 2029, which are both on the agenda of the session.

Regarding the resolutions, we remain committed to briefing you as frequently as possible, and we equally look forward to your support in ensuring that all resolutions can be implemented equitably as expected. We have taken due note of your feedback during the past briefing sessions including the request that those resolutions that do not have firm legislative timelines should have some indicative timeframes for their sustainable implementation. The Executive Board at the upcoming session will indeed consider the progress in implementing all resolutions of the Assembly and we look forward to your guidance and recommendations. I take this opportunity to thank you all for endorsing the terms of reference of the urban action funding window towards achieving the implementation of UN-Habitat Assembly resolutions in a balanced manner at the last session of the Executive Board held in November 2023. This could enable us from next year to utilize unspent balances on the implementation of resolutions, in line with Resolution 2/10 of the Assembly. Internally, we have an established task-force headed by myself that meets regularly to consider the progress in implementing each resolution and monitor any related challenges.

Regarding the next Strategic plan 2026 to 2029, we have received your preliminary feedback including on the roadmap for the preparation of the draft of that strategic plan. I wish to assure you of our commitment to walk that journey with Member States including through a clearer roadmap that would include additional meetings and retreats such as the one held on 31 January 2024. On 15-16 April, we are organizing a staff retreat with the task force for wider internal consultation and engagement. I look forward to briefing you further on this subject during the Executive Board session.

As I conclude on the preparation and expectations of the upcoming session of the Executive Board, I take note with great encouragement that the work of the ad hoc working group on the development of a Stakeholder engagement policy is progressing following the election of the substantive Chair. The Secretariat remains fully available to support that ad hoc working group and we are hopeful that the upcoming sessions of the Executive Board, particularly the second session of 2024 perhaps could be in a position to make progressive decisions on the draft stakeholder engagement policy for consideration by the Assembly at its resumed second session in May 2025.

Mr. Chairman / Madam Chairperson,  
Excellencies,

Let me now move to some quick **updates regarding the work of UN-Habitat in your region**. Overall, I'm pleased with the remarkable progress and strategic initiatives that are underway in the region.

Our world is experiencing complex humanitarian challenges, leading to large-scale displacement. Recent estimates indicate that more than 30 million people have been forcibly displaced globally, including refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The African continent is facing many insecurity challenges that have a direct impact



on urban centres and cities with protracted displacement of populations – for example in Sudan, Libya, Mali, Eastern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo remain significant areas of concern, suffering from ongoing conflicts and environmental hazards, resulting in significant population movements within and across borders. This is aggravated by the effects of climate changes, where many areas also regularly experience severe flooding, drought, desertification and land degradation, leading to additional socio-economic vulnerabilities, especially in urban areas.

The proliferation of informal settlements remains a persistent issue in the African region. These settlements are often a result of weak urban growth management capacity and other related issues such as rule of law, reflecting other problems that relate to poverty. Informal settlements often stem from poverty and rapid urbanization. Limited access to formal housing and jobs pushes low-income individuals to settle in these areas. With insecure land tenure and inadequate infrastructure, residents face constant risks of eviction and struggle to access basic services. Addressing informal settlements requires tackling poverty, improving housing access, and promoting inclusive urban development.

The ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Sudan pose significant challenges to the region. UN-Habitat is actively engaged in monitoring and collecting data to prepare for and support early recovery and reconstruction efforts as soon as possible. Our focus lies in building back better, leveraging our experiences from similar situations in the region. By prioritizing resilience and sustainable development, we aim to contribute effectively to the recovery process.

On a positive note, the African Union has recognized the importance of tackling urban issues: During the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in February, the AU endorsed the African Urban Resilience Framework to guide Member States in addressing climate shocks and stresses in cities in

Africa, making this the first time that the interconnectedness of urbanization and climate change in Africa has been formally acknowledged as a priority.

UN-Habitat also commends the support of African Ministers of Urban Development and the African Diplomatic Corps, as we have seen an increase of contributions from African countries to earmarked and non-earmarked programs for UN-Habitat. And we look forward to 2024 contributions. As the World Urban Forum (hosted in Africa) is approaching, we count on this Group to mobilize high-level delegations from your respective countries (Prime Ministers and Ministers of Housing and Urban Development). With this, I also want to stress that your continued advocacy of UN-Habitat's important mandate is of utmost importance to us, and I am deeply grateful for your support.

Let me now give you an overview of three upcoming events in the region: First, the Africa SDGs Forum, taking place on 23-25 April in Addis Ababa, with immediate relevance to UN-Habitat on SDG 11 and beyond. Second, a Regional Roundtable on the Loss and Damage Fund will be hosted by the African Risk Capacity (ARC) in Johannesburg on 7-8 May. A session on urban resilience will be led by UN-Habitat. Third, the Africa Urban Forum which we are co-hosting, taking place on 4-6 September with the theme "Sustainable Urbanization for Africa's Transformation, which is set to become a key milestone for the continent to elevate the urban agenda.

I also want to draw your attention to key highlights from our programmatic work and significant achievements in the region. **I'll start with the figures:** In 2023, our project acquisitions culminated to USD 45.5 million. The figure in 2024 stands at USD 7 million at the end of this Q1. We have USD 48 million in the hard pipeline. **So where is this funding going to in detail?**

We renewed our engagement in the DRC with the Central Forest Initiative (CAFI) with a grant of USD 15 million to support land reforms in DRC and to secure community land rights with the view of protecting essential carbon sinks. We also salute the engagement of Norway in Mozambique for a total contribution of USD 4 million to support urban resilience programs and local climate action, after another grant to Ghana on the localization of the SDGs. We are delighted to see more and more countries embracing our people-centred smart cities concept – Cameroun, Ghana, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa to mention a few. The Government of South Africa has approved the Habitat Country Programme and we are working closely with the Department of Human Settlements to open a country office in Pretoria. In Kenya, we have just signed an agreement with the World Bank to support durable solutions for refugees in Kalobeyei and Dadaab, after we successfully concluded our four-year pilot that saw the transformation of refugee camps into municipalities built on systematic and sustainable urban planning principles.

***NOTE:*** AED to invite *the respective RR (Oumar Sylla for the Africa Office and Ranya Hedyia for the Arab States (regarding North African Countries)). For a detailed presentation on the region.*

### **Agenda item 5. Any other matters**

*(Under AOB)*

***NOTE:*** AED you could add here a few words on the expected field trip to Mozambique from of 3-7 June 2024, should time allow.

We now have a formal confirmation from the Government of Mozambique, welcoming Member States for the field trip to Mozambique, that will most likely take place from 3-7 June 2024.

We are working with the Government to identify the exact locations within Mozambique for the Field trip. For now, locations on the table include the cities of Maputo, Beira and Pemba where UN-Habitat has active programs.

Over the past 17 years, UN-Habitat has diligently developed and executed a comprehensive country program in Mozambique aligned with the priority areas delineated by the Government of Mozambique, development partners, and global development agendas.

Currently, UN-Habitat Mozambique operates through three key program pillars:

- Sustainable Urbanization
- Disaster Risk Reduction
- Climate Change Adaptation, and Security of Land Tenure and Affordable Housing.

We will soon send out formal communication to Member States requesting you to save the dates and participate in the field trip.

I thank you.