

**Keynote Speech by Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, United Nations Under-Secretary
General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat**

OSLOPAX Summit 2019: Urban Solutions on Peace and Climate Issues

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**Honourable Ine Eriksen, Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Honourable Raymond Johansen, Governing Mayor Oslo, Honourable Liv
Torres, Executive Director of Nobel Peace Centre Excellencies and
distinguished Youth participants in the Oslo Pax Summit, Ladies and
Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today at this important inaugural Summit on the nexus between peace and climate change. It is an urgent topic and a timely moment to address one of the most critical global challenges of our time. Many decision makers and young climate leaders from around the world will be gathering later this month in New York, during the Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit. This forum will allow for your voices to be captured among the recommendations proposed to the Secretary General.

As we speak, the urgency of addressing climate action has never been clearer. But as we speak of the environmental impact and economic damage, we often forget the social impact of climate change – its impact on societies, and on peace within and between societies.

The IPCC's Special 1.5C report issued last year confirmed something that many of us have experienced firsthand – climate change and climate variability worsen existing poverty and exacerbate inequalities. And yet – I quote from the report – “Identifying and addressing poverty and inequality is at the core of staying within a safe and just space for humanity.” End of quote.

We all know that climate change will directly affect the availability, quality, and access to water, food and ecosystem services in cities, as well as the competition for land, unsustainable land use patterns, energy and infrastructure. In other words, it will endanger that “safe and just space for humanity” which is mentioned by the IPCC report.

The UN Security Council has discussed the relationship of climate change with peace and security since 2007. It has been reaffirmed over the past decade that exacerbated competition over diminishing resources is decreasing the resilience of populations to cope with humanitarian crises. When economic activity declines, and young people find themselves unemployed and existing on the fringes of society, it makes them vulnerable to exploitation, exposes to them to violent extremism and creates opportunities for potential radicalisation. Clearly, climate change is a “threat multiplier”, which interacts with all known dynamics of conflict in direct and indirect ways.

So why focus on cities? 55% of the world's population is urban, and by 2050 it will be 68%. As the world grows more urban, the locus of conflict also shifts to cities. As a former Mayor, I can tell you that everyday social conflict intensifies with large-scale migration and competition for resources, increasing the likelihood of prolonged instability or violent conflict. It leads to increased social and spatial fragmentation the city, separation of rich and poor neighbourhoods, stretching the capacities of societies and governments alike. The most vulnerable groups, specifically children, women, youth older persons, the poor, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and indigenous populations, are often hit the hardest and take the longest to recover. This is why cities are not only at the frontline of climate action, but also in managing its impacts on peace and security.

With cities being responsible for 75 percent of global CO2 emissions, predominantly from transport and buildings, they are obviously central to climate change mitigation. But efforts to reduce greenhouse gases must go hand in hand with measures to reduce inequalities and manage rapid urbanization. This will require bold and ambitious efforts and changes in the way we engage with young people as we plan, design, build and manage cities.

At UN-Habitat, we believe that young people are key actors towards creating more sustainable and low carbon pathways to help combat devastating global warming in the next 12 years while, at the same time, building less vulnerable and more resilient cities. The better we do this, the less harmful the linked social, environmental, and economic impact will be.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we cannot continue to function as usual, and then expect different results. We all know what Albert Einstein had to say about that! Clearly, in order to tackle this climate emergency, we need to adopt radically different approaches, and make bold, inspiring choices.

At UN-Habitat, we have adopted bold new approaches to planning and building differently. Planning differently implies designing compact, connected, integrated cities and human settlements that optimize land, resource and energy use. We know that urban form and structure, and the building materials used, significantly affect greenhouse gas emissions. We are also aware that our ecosystems must be protected in order to ensure the wellbeing, health and safety of our communities. And our experience has taught us that inclusive, broad-based participation that amplifies the voices of those that are the most marginalised, is central to ensuring that no one gets left behind.

Building differently requires using robust low-carbon yet affordable technologies that can withstand the impacts of extreme weather as well as other challenges, as well as finding alternative solutions to traditional value chains so that we can advance the circular economy at the city level. It also implies creating new, green jobs for young people in cities.

In addition to integrated and low carbon approaches to urban planning and development, a fundamentally pro-poor approach to climate action is central to our work. Climate events and their associated security challenges will trap those furthest behind unless we adopt a pro-poor approach to planning, building and managing cities and we prepare the most vulnerable communities to become resilient to upcoming risks. UN-Habitat supports

the assessment of climate change vulnerability and city-level resilience in cities around the world such as Bamenda, (Cameroon), Lami Town (Fiji), Honiara (Solomon Islands), and Montego Bay (Jamaica), to bring concrete risk-reducing infrastructure and services to communities. My visit to Mozambique in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai reconfirmed to me the importance of putting communities at the centre of all climate interventions. We are therefore launching a new initiative titled “Building Climate Resilience of the Urban Poor”, at the SG’s Climate Summit – in close collaboration with the Governments of Kenya and Brazil, and a wide range of partners. This global initiative aims to build on our past work and reduce climate vulnerability of 150 million urban slum and informal settlement dwellers across 140 hotspot cities in 50 countries, by 2023. We further aim to scale this effort to reach 600 million people by 2030. I appeal to you to join forces with us in this endeavour, so that we can collectively address some of the root causes of conflict and insecurity in this world.

Ladies and gentlemen, for UN-Habitat, strengthened climate action and improved urban environment and effective urban crisis prevention and response constitute two of our four strategic focus areas for the next several years. Working with all levels of governments, especially young people, civil society and the business community is essential in our global quest for a low carbon, climate resilient, inclusive and peaceful future.

As we move towards the implementation of our new strategic plan, the Oslo Pax Summit is an excellent opportunity to reiterate our commitment to work with all of you, and to reaffirm the critical role that young people play, in tackling the global environmental challenges together. I am glad to hear that one of the outcomes of this two-day summit will be a set of recommendations presented to the UN Secretary-General as an input to the forthcoming Climate Action Summit. Indeed, it is leaders such as yourselves who are here today, who can drive the transformation towards low-carbon, climate-resilient, smart and inclusive cities of the future.

So, let's join hands to take climate action in cities now! I assure you that you can count on me as a climate action and youth champion in this fight for our planet’s survival and the future of the generations to come.