

Opening Remarks by Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Women Assembly at the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum

Monday 14 October 2019 at SETIA Spice Convention Centre, Penang

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Women's Assembly, taking place as pre-forum event in conjunction with the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this event.

I am so happy to be here today with all of you. I would like to extend a special thanks to the members of the UN-Habitat Advisory Group on Gender Issues for their leadership in organizing this event in collaboration with Huairou Commission and Penang Women's Development Corporation.

Most of you know my personal and professional commitment for promoting and implementing inclusion and gender equality. When I was a mayor of Penang, gender equality and empowering women and girls was at the centre of my agenda.

Gender-based discrimination persists in many parts of the world, including in Asia-Pacific. The world is witnessing an increased feminisation of poverty. Women and girls make up a large proportion of the informal sector of employment in cities. They are disproportionately affected by limited access to safe places of work, to education, healthcare and many other services.

While much progress has been made in recent decades, much more remains to be done to ensure that women and girls are guaranteed the opportunity to live up their fullest potential. In South Asia, only 7% women are members of political parties. Less than 5% of the police force is female, and less than 10% of judges.

Gender equality is not just the concern for half of the world's population. It is a human right, and a concern for us all. This is because no society can achieve sustainable development when half of its population is marginalised. We must take stronger action to ensure that we leave no one behind.

Today, women have opportunities that our mothers could only dream about. Many women excel, in any field, from exploring the universe to leading a nation. Data from UN Women shows that limits on women's participation in the workforce across the Asia-Pacific region cost the regional economy an estimated US\$89 billion every year.

We must do more in supporting national and local governments in localising the gender equality dimensions of the SDGs. The new UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023 has placed issues related to gender equality, children, youth, older persons and disability at its centre. This will ensure that all UN-Habitat's programmes and work will prioritise inclusiveness for all as we work to implement the New Urban Agenda and achieve the SDGs. We strive to leave no one and no place behind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We count on your partnership and support to implement this vision and look forward to working with all of you to achieve gender equality and ensure inclusive and accessible cities for all.

Let me conclude this by also extending my warmest invitation to you to participate at the Tenth World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi from 8 – 13 February 2020. WUF10 will be the next milestone as we move forward together for on our path towards a better quality for life in an urbanizing world.

I wish you the best in your proceedings today and a fruitful week here at APUF7.

Thank you very much!