

**Opening Remarks by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat  
Maimunah Mohd Sharif  
First session of the Executive Board  
29 June 2020**

Your Excellency Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board.

Your Excellencies, Members of the Executive Board.

Our special guests including Her Excellency Madame Martha Delgado, Chairperson of the UN-Habitat Assembly,

Representing the Host Country, His Excellency Mr Charles Hinga, Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, Urban Development and Public Works of Kenya,

Her Excellency Madam Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Director-General of UNON.

Your Excellencies Ministers, Ambassadors and distinguished delegations of Member States as well as representatives of UN agencies, private sector, professional and civil society partners, on behalf of UN-Habitat, a very warm welcome to the first UN-Habitat Executive Board of meeting for 2020.

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening; Asante Sana.

Mr Chairperson,

How different it was when many of us met at the 10th session of the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi in February 2020. Let me thank the Executive Board Bureau for their guidance in ensuring that we can proceed with this virtual meeting. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of UN-Habitat colleagues led by Mr Victor Kisob, the Deputy Executive Director, for the careful preparations leading up to this virtual meeting.

COVID-19 is intensifying with global infection rates rising, and the socio-economic impacts are likely to deepen further. Although there is no return to what the world was before this pandemic, there is every opportunity to address underlying inequalities and renew efforts to build sustainable, inclusive, and safe cities.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out, better global coordination is needed to save lives, and UN-Habitat has contributed to its mandated normative role by its active participation in the UN Response Plan. With the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), there is now a

robust urban dimension in humanitarian efforts. We have contributed to an urban chapter in the Secretary-General's COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan, and we are also the pen-holder drafting the Secretary General's Report on COVID-19 and Cities.

Your Excellencies,

As of 31 May 2020, UN-Habitat is managing 268 on-going projects worth approximately USD 665.7 million, which include 173 projects totaling USD 516.4 million generated from our field offices and 95 projects totaling USD 149.4 million managed from headquarters. We have a presence in over 70 countries worldwide.

As of 31 May 2020, USD 74.5 million in projects have been acquired. Let me take this opportunity to thank member states and donors who have given us no-cost extensions as well as allowing flexibility in reprogramming country projects to address changing priorities related to the COVID response.

Your Excellencies, Mr Chairperson

UN-Habitat's agile and rapid response to COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the vigour of our institutional reform and restructuring process. I am pleased to report that structural alignment at headquarters has been in place since 2 January 2020. Further, a corporate delineation of responsibilities, accountabilities, and coordination has been developed and implemented. The review of our global presence and guiding policy documents are well advanced and will be provided to you at the next Executive Board meeting later this year.

Building on the change management process outlined, we have been able to put into practice what I call 'a whole of house' approach, breaking down silos and developing an integrated and participative approach to management. This approach was first demonstrated through the lead up to and the great success of the 10th World Urban Forum.

Despite our constrained financial position (which we will be discussing in more depth today), we were able to create an internal emergency fund of USD 1.3 million to activate quick-impact projects in 13 countries. The first-ever UN-Habitat global appeal was issued through our COVID-19 Response Plan, targeting support for 64 countries and a consolidated funding requirement of USD 72 million to meet urgent needs until the end of this year. Between new funding and reprogrammed donor resources, we are approximately 20% funded to date. Please allow me to inform you that my colleagues will provide a more comprehensive update on our COVID-19 Response plan in Agenda Item 4.

Your Excellencies,

What remains a challenge is the normative work that is supported by the Foundation General Purpose fund. Core contributions have not materialised, despite the work done to strengthen accountability, transparency, and a streamlined organisation structure. As we now reach the mid-year point, we have received less than 10% of the USD 18.9 million approved at the last Executive Board in November 2019. Based on pledges and anticipated contributions, our best-case scenario today indicates a total contribution of \$4.2 million to the Foundation core funding, which is only 80% of the contributions received in 2019.

What does this mean for the mandate? The Foundation General Purpose gives real meaning to the oversight function of the Executive Board. Unlike the Regular Budget or the Foundation Special Purpose fund, which are rigid in their use, the Foundation General Purpose fund was created with the specific purpose to allow UN-Habitat to meet the normative obligations set by the Member States. Each resolution passed, including the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, requires the agency to add to its work programme to meet its obligations.

At the projected level of USD 4.2 million, we will be able to fulfil only 25% of the mandated activities. This would mean that the normative work on human rights mainstreaming, social inclusion, gender and youth, urban safety, urban resilience, urban legislation and urban governance would be severely affected. It would also mean that only two out of the five newly-established flagship programmes would be fully developed during the first two years of the strategic plan. Work on urban data, results monitoring and communications would suffer tremendously.

Following the general trend, UN-Habitat is encouraged to seek out donors for its normative work, which would be a partial solution. Projectized funds to support core mandate activities would not allow adaptation to specific resolutions or reporting such as the State of the World Cities: Adapting to Pandemics, which we are putting together now. We are, however, pursuing the options of global programmes which would allow for some directive funding to specific deliverables in support of the core mandate and normative guidance.

We are also working on a diversified funding portfolio, including increased outreach to the private sector and philanthropies to support our work in co-financing sustainable urbanization projects. We are also seeking out the possibility of setting up an endowment to support UN-Habitat's mandated activities in the medium-term. Once again, these initiatives take time when our mandate requires us to act now.

As I said last year, we have tried our best to meet your expectations. In the last twenty-four months, we have brought to life a governance structure in line with Member State requirements. We have streamlined our structure and are delivering despite challenging global circumstances, rising to the challenge and doing more in more places. We have aligned with system-wide UN reforms.

It is now time to work together—as UN-Habitat working with Member States—to ensure we can deliver on the resolutions and mandate which has been agreed and conferred upon us. I look forward to a lively debate and your guidance on how we now bring to life the vision which you have endorsed through our Strategic Plan and budget, and how we address the pressing financial issues which are hampering us now just as we are at the moment of lift-off.

Your Excellencies,

UN-Habitat and the future of this programme are in your hands.

Thank you.