



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Executive Director of UN-Habitat speech at the Kenya Urban Forum “Strategic Pathways to Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanization in Kenya”

Date: 14 June 2023

- Your Excellency Dr. William Samuel Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya,
- All protocols observed.

A very good afternoon to all of you!

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

I will try to be short. Please allow me to thank you once again for officiating the just concluded second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly in Nairobi. Your address to the 137 Member States in the presence of 90 ministers was truly inspiring. Your words continue to give me the much-needed vitamin P - the Passion – to serve and support Member States to implement the New Urban Agenda and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Let me convey to you the appreciation from the 5000 delegates from all around the world for the hospitality generously offered by the people of Kenya and for having showcased to the world how Kenya is addressing its urban-related challenges. As you know, with the support of your government, Member States at the Assembly ratified 10 Resolutions and adopted the Ministerial Declaration, titled “*A Sustainable Urban Future through Inclusive and Effective Multilateralism: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Times of Global Crisis*”.

Like other countries in Africa, Kenya’s future is urban. Out of a total population of 53 million, more than 32 % now live in cities and urban centers. Kenya is also experiencing an urban growth of 3.7% per annum. The challenge of our times is to harness the power of urbanization to align the needs of the people, the economy, and the city. We are at a moment in time that will never come again. It is the moment to get urbanization right. To ensure the balance between rural and urban needs.

Kenya is already a leader in the implementation of the devolution process. What we need now is to help each county strengthen its own source revenue collection, define their unique selling point and co-create unique economic offerings.

Furthermore, I am inspired by the speech of Her Excellency Mama Rachel Ruto at the First Lady's Roundtable during the second United Nations Habitat Assembly, where she highlighted community-level and other bottom-up efforts to widen job creation at the local level. Kenya's rich and diverse cultures can be a source of inspiration for unique county-level products.

However, as you rightly pointed out, the sustainability of such efforts can only be achieved if we take care of the most basic rights. Affordable housing and slum transformation will need to be financed. This is in line with the thoughts of his Excellency William Samoei Ruto, as he highlighted the key role of adequate housing as the basis for sustainable urbanization at the just concluded UN Habitat Assembly.

UN-Habitat has been supporting municipal revenue enhancements, waste management, mobility systems, and non-motorized transportation systems in many counties. We have also been involved in the resettlement of refugees in Kalobeyei. More recently UN-Habitat also embarked on new initiatives such as the Nairobi River Regeneration and the Blue Economy for six coastal counties in Kenya to unlock the economic and environmental potential through linkages between land and sea planning, waste management, and ecosystem protection. We must now capitalize on the initial investment by the European Union into a dedicated spatial development plan to attract both local and foreign direct investments.

Your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen,

This Inaugural Kenya Urban Forum (KUF), under the theme "***Strategic Pathways to Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanization in Kenya***," enables country-level stakeholders to develop strategic avenues for localizing Sustainable Development Goals. I hope all the counties taking part in this first Kenya National Forum will be ready to declare their actions, both new and completed ones, at the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum in Cairo, Egypt, 4-8 November 2024.

I also urge the Kenya Urban Forum Secretariat and participants to take note of each of the ten United Nations Habitat Assembly resolutions as the basis for the Kenya Urban Forum outcome document. By doing so, we leverage the knowledge generated from such forums to inform policy, local action, and ultimately service delivery.

This can start with the Habitat Country Programme Document (HCPD), which will be launched. The document will guide our collaboration with your government in the coming five years and will allow UN-Habitat to support the urban agenda in Kenya. The document is structured under Four main focus areas namely:

1. Improved land management and sustainably planned human settlements.
2. Improved access to housing, quality urban basic services and infrastructure as well as upgraded slums and informal settlements.
3. Promotion of innovative mechanisms in urban economy and financing.
4. Climate Change, Resilience and Disaster Risk Management.

Your Excellency,

As I conclude, I would like to reflect on our discussions in State House two weeks ago about the journey to elevate the urban agenda in the following upcoming events. I look forward to your continued championing of the urban agenda and of UN-Habitat at the High-level Political Forum, the SDGs Summit, the Africa Climate Week, COP 28, and the Summit of the Future. Once again, let me assure you, Mr. President, UN-Habitat commitment to work with your government towards the elevation of the outcomes of both the United Habitat Assembly and the Kenya Urban Forum as we help Kenya become a beacon for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the world.

I thank you. Asante sana!

