

Title: Introductory Statement of the Executive Director at the Ceremonial Opening of the Second United Nations Habitat Assembly.

Date: Monday, 5 June 2023
Time: Morning Session
Venue: Conference Room 2, UNON, Nairobi, Kenya

Salutations

- Your Excellency, Honorable Dr William Rutto, President of the Republic of Kenya
- [Your Excellency, Mr. Slumber Tsogwane](#), Vice President of the Republic of Botswana,
- Honorable Ramon Meyer Falcon, Secretary of Agrarian, Land, and Urban Development (SEDATU), Mexico and President of the First Session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly,
- Mr Li Junhua, Under Secretary General of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, representing the Secretary-General of the United Nations,
- [My sister, Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi](#)
- Heads of delegations,

- Your Excellencies Parliamentarians, Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives and Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Mayors and local government representatives,
- Representatives of UN-Habitat Partners, the Private Sector and Civil Society organizations,
- Distinguished Delegates, Members of the Press,
- My United Nations colleagues,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Karibuni sana Nairobi! Welcome to the second United Nations Habitat Assembly. This morning, we mark the completion of a full cycle of our governance structure. Let me congratulate and thank Member States for this achievement, and for your support to UN-Habitat.

2. My sister Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Director-General of UNON, thank you for all the support and arrangements from your team. We look forward to working closely with you to highlight the improvements to this beautiful campus to enable us to convene Member States in the future.

3. At this second Assembly, we are coming together at a time when the world is facing multiple and inter-related crises. In February 2020, the world was in lock-down because of Covid-19. The socio-economic fallout have intensified inequalities and fuelled conflicts in every region of the world. All this is happening when humanity is facing a triple planetary crisis involving climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. As the Secretary-General said: “Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been.”

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

4. It is very appropriate that our second United Nations Habitat Assembly is starting on World Environment Day. It is significant because the climate goals, the Paris Agreement and our aspirations to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees can only be achieved if Member States prioritise sustainable urbanisation as the basis for sustainable development. We are grateful that for the first time 50 ministers of housing and planning met at COP27 in Sham Al-Sheikh, Egypt to ensure that we mainstream and prioritise a just transition of our cities and communities for the sake of future generations.

5. The reality is that impact of extreme climate events, conflicts, natural disasters, global pandemics and the cost of living crisis are felt first and foremost in cities. Their secondary effects, often long term in nature, are also visited upon urban areas. Multidimensional inequalities continue to deepen between and within countries and territories weakening the social contract that forms the foundations of our societies.

Your Excellency President Ruto,

6. I am very grateful for the continued support of Kenya for UN-Habitat especially as we are celebrating 45 years in Nairobi. Kenya, under your leadership, continues to be beacon of hope. As you know first hand, those of us from humble beginnings, understand how adequate housing and urbanisation can deliver a better quality of life. The more well-planned and well-organised, the more people we can uplift from poverty.

7. Unfortunately, humanity's over-reliance on carbon and consumption, is not only killing our planet, it is also leaving some 3 billion people in inadequate housing.

Even in the most advanced countries, an increasing number of citizens are homeless. They are joined by 1.5 billion currently residing in poor and unhealthy housing.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

8. The challenge before us is enormous. The only way we can achieve positive and transformative impact on the ground is not to go it alone but to embrace multilateral action. Here I would like to quote a Swahili proverb that reads: “unity is strength, division is weakness”.

9. To answer the call of Member States to set our priorities, we have taken guidance from Member States at the High Level Meeting on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda last year. We are also grateful for inputs from the ministerial roundtables at the 11th session of the World Urban Forum and at COP27 respectively. I have put forward UN-Habitat’s priorities including on adequate housing, climate adaptation, localising the Sustainable Development Goals; and better urban crisis management.

10. They correspond to the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan that was approved by Member States in the first Assembly. We thank the Committee of Permanent Representatives that pronounced on the robustness of the our Strategic Plan despite Covid-19. We appreciate the guidance from the Executive Board to extend the Strategic Plan by a further two years to be aligned with the rest of the United Nations System.

11. Before I conclude, I wish to acknowledge the considerable support and wise counsel we have received over many weeks and months from members of the Executive Board, the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the Bureau of the UN-Habitat Assembly.

12. Let us flip the script on urbanisation. We need practical and pragmatic ways to transform our cities into champions of zero waste. We need to formulate policies that guide countries towards carbon neutrality. We need to harness the talent in cities and communities to reshape financing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We need Member States to prioritise national and local cooperation as the basis a just transition. Let us never forget human rights and the UN Charter as the basis for sustainable urbanisation.

13. President Ruto and [Vice President Tsogwane](#), I thank you for your presence at the Second United Nations Habitat Assembly. I thank you for championing sustainable urbanisation. I humbly submit the request from this plenary for you both to carry the torch for a better [urban](#) future for all on the global stage.

I thank you.