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Preparations for the twelfth session of the World  
Urban Forum

## Report of the Executive Director on the status of preparations for the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum\*\*

### I. Introduction

1. One of the key roles of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is to mobilize broader action regarding sustainable urbanization at all levels and by all stakeholders. Since its establishment in 2001, the World Urban Forum (WUF) has become the primary advocacy platform for urban transformation, bringing together leading urban actors to address the most pressing issues relating to urbanization and its impact on cities, communities, economies, and the environment.
2. The Forum allows UN-Habitat to strengthen its global mandate, achieve expected results and leverage action towards implementation of the New Urban Agenda, and has progressively strengthened its authority as a key **coordination, advocacy, partnership, and knowledge platform on sustainable urbanization**. It is also recognized in the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 as a key vehicle for strengthening collaboration and partnerships with diverse stakeholders.
3. The twelfth session of the World Urban Forum will be held in Cairo from 4 to 8 November 2023. In preparation, UN-Habitat will be working with Member States, local governments, and stakeholders to ensure wide consultation on the background paper, programme, and engagement opportunities. UN-Habitat will also continue to advocate for the commitments that comprise the declared actions and will track the progress of the Katowice Declared Actions,<sup>1</sup> set out in the outcome document of the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, held in Katowice, Poland in June 2022.

### II. World Urban Forum

4. The World Urban Forum was established pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 18/5 of the Commission on Human Settlements and has progressively strengthened its authority as a key platform for coordination, advocacy, partnership, and knowledge on sustainable urbanization.
5. A revised programme design for the next three cycles has been drafted and submitted for approval in September 2023 by UN-Habitat's programme review committee. The new programme for the next 3 cycles (WUF 12, 13 and 14) also gives UN-Habitat an opportunity to refine, review, and

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\*\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/actions> (this link needs to contain the last version of the declared actions)

strengthen the objectives and logical framework to guide the impactful implementation of the next three sessions. The World Urban Forum has three main revised objectives.

(a) To provide an open, inclusive, and diverse platform where all stakeholders of the New Urban Agenda and the Habitat mandate contributes to transformative change in urban policy, governance, and the advancement of human rights.

(b) To convene and foster collective knowledge, innovative and transformative critical thinking, and thought leadership across all stakeholder types in human settlements and the urban development field.

(c) To increase cooperation and forge constructive partnerships to mainstream sustainable urbanisation in national development policies, local level development plans and private sector investments.

6. The WUF gathers thought leaders and urban actors to address pressing urbanization issues and their impacts on cities, communities, economies, and the environment. Participants range from international organizations, governments (local, national, regional), civil society, grassroots communities, disadvantaged groups, private sector, and academia. Across 11 sessions since 2002, the World Urban Forum has transformed into the premier global conference on sustainable urbanization, where stakeholders showcase innovative solutions, influencing policies and actions in the communities they serve. For UN-Habitat, it serves as an enabler and a vital platform for advocating and monitoring the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

## II. Preparations for the Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum

7. During the UNHA2, the Arab Republic of Egypt and UN-Habitat held a joint press conference announcing the dates for the WUF12 (4 – 8 November 2024) and the joint vision of achieving a sustainable, universally accessible, and inclusive forum. Moreover, UN-Habitat convened the World Urban Forum Alumni Network, comprised of past WUF hosts, to gather lessons learned and offer a wide network of support to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt in preparation to host the forum.

8. On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023, UN-Habitat held an Internal Exploratory Workshop on the Theme and Programme for the World Urban Forum, attended by UN-Habitat and selected external experts. The exploratory workshop aimed at producing an initial think-piece that UN-Habitat will present to the WUF12 host country and stakeholders to initiate the WUF12 Background Paper drafting process. The theme direction on the “localization of SDGs” was explored based on structured discussions, deliberations from the launch of SDG11 synthesis report at the HLPF, and building on some of the key findings of the World Cities Report 2024.

9. On 2 October 2023 during the World Habitat Day in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan, the WUF12 **theme direction** on ‘Localization of the SDGs’ was advocated for amongst partners. The **theme direction** of the twelfth session provides a script for stakeholders to raise awareness and promote sustainable urbanization solutions. The theme amplifies the Secretary-General’s recommendation during the launch of the 2023 special edition of the SDGs Progress report that “Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been”.<sup>2</sup>

10. The **theme direction** of “**Localization of the SDGs**” is aligned with the World Cities Report 2024 on **Cities and Climate Action**. Linked closely to the achievement of the New Urban Agenda, one of WUF12’s main sessions will carry a strong link to the theme of the World Cities Report 2024.

11. The **WUF12 background Paper** is being developed and aims at setting the tone for debate and discussion, including sharing of best practices for replication, up-scaling, and adaptation to different contexts. It support the curation of the Forum as a style guide of harmonized language to express and communicate the ideas considered to be at the foundation of participation and engagement opportunities. The background paper will also map broad urban development issues, trends, and priorities, taking into consideration their relevance to the global urban development agenda and United Nations system priorities.

12. To ensure that the World Urban Forum remains inclusive and consultative, the first draft of the WUF12 background paper will be shared with Member States, external partners, and the task force for the Twelfth Session.

<sup>2</sup> <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition.pdf>

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13. **The WUF12 Main Sessions** will be curated by UN-Habitat and facilitated by thought leaders and high-profile experts. They will include an opening and closing session, dialogues, assemblies, roundtables, special sessions, and a series of parallel events hosted and facilitated by UN-Habitat, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and partners. The sessions will be curated to showcase examples, practices, and concrete solutions that can display positive and transformative impact. The sessions will also follow up on actions arising from the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the SDG summit, and the General Assembly, held in New York in 2023, and the Summit of the Future in 2024.
14. The five-day event will conclude with declared actions: recommendations that representatives of all stakeholder groups take back home for further discussion and implementation. The Cairo Declared Actions are expected to build on the commitments made during the UNHA2, HLPF, SDG summit, and Summit of the Future, highlighting the actions that implement the New Urban Agenda.
15. **Looking forward**, UN-Habitat will focus on regional mobilization through a wide array of advocacy platforms which include but not limited to multi-level urban forums, Urban October, and other partner-led advocacy platforms. The WUF12 will provide concrete opportunities for Member State to participate at a high-level, contribute, and share best practices from their regions.
16. Regional and national urban forums continue to lead the way towards WUF12. To date, the following countries and subregions have held national urban forums since 2022: Israel, Kenya, Colombia, Azerbaijan has held two sessions, Malaysia, the State of Palestine, Lebanon, Serbia, Nepal, Paraguay, and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic at the national level; and the Pacific Urban Forum, Turkic States Urban Forum, at the subregional level, and Moscow Urban forum at the city level. At the regional level, ministerial meetings on the New Urban Agenda were held in Buenos Aires, on 10 and 11 April 2023, by the General Assembly of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America, and the 8th Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-8) was held from 23 to 25 October 2023 in Suwon City, Republic of Korea.
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