UN-Habitat Assembly Highlights:
Wednesday, 29 May 2019

On Wednesday, the first UN-Habitat Assembly (UNHA 1) hosted its High-Level Segment. The opening session featured statements from: Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya; Salva Kiir, President of South Sudan; Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji; and Maen Abdulmalik Saeed, Prime Minister of Yemen. UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif and UNHA 1 President Martha Delgado Peralta also made opening remarks. Three high-level interactive thematic dialogues took place during the day.

High-Level Segment

Opening panel: Julie Gichuru, Media Personality, Kenya, moderated the panel discussion.

UNHA 1 President Martha Delgado Peralta, noted that the future will be predominately urban and innovation is an essential ingredient for fostering prosperous, inclusive cities. She stressed the importance of local governments’ leadership for effective decision making and cautioned against corruption, ensuring that private sector engagement is based on sound regulatory policies.

UN-Habitat Executive Director, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, invited delegates to reflect on: how cities can promote smart urban technologies; national requirements for fostering innovative solutions; how national institutions could be reinforced to better integrate new knowledge and solutions; the role of UN-Habitat in engaging actors in the smart cities sector; and what role UN-Habitat could play in assessing and advising on the innovation capacities of cities globally. She further stressed that the normative component of UN-Habitat’s work could assist countries to address crises in urban areas, and underlined the convening power of UN-Habitat to link governments and citizens with the private sector to create bankable urban development projects.

Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, prioritized affordable housing, explaining that demand had exceeded the target of 500,000 new units, and stressed the need for innovative ways of achieving this objective, including partnering with the private sector. Underscoring the role of small and medium enterprises, he stressed the need for creating the enabling environment for partnerships with the private sector, noting the role of governments in ensuring that the right policies and frameworks are in place. President Kenyatta reiterated Kenya’s commitment to the climate change agenda and to multilateral institutions including UN-Habitat, announcing the country’s contribution of an additional USD 100,000 to the Voluntary Fund.

Salva Kiir, President of South Sudan, drew attention to the lack of housing in South Sudan and the need to implement the revitalized peace agreement to pave the way for infrastructure development. He noted that the private sector engagement is very weak in South Sudan, emphasizing the role of banks in providing loans for small businesses. President Kiir further announced his country’s contribution of USD 40,000 towards implementing the UN-Habitat agenda.

Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, highlighted the urgency of the climate crisis, calling for ambitious global action. He emphasized adaptation, noting that cyclone Winston had exposed vulnerabilities across the national economy. He added that, in the face of worsening climate impacts adaptation...
efforts “will not save us without cutting emissions,” and highlighted new financing mechanisms, access to expertise and new technologies, and the need for all stakeholders to be part of the solution. Prime Minister Bainimarama called for decision makers to attend the Climate Summit in September 2019, in New York with more robust nationally determined contributions and revised emissions targets.

Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed, Prime Minister of Yemen, emphasized multiple challenges for countries in conflict. He highlighted problems associated with infrastructure degradation and internally displaced people, and noted that innovation and technology could assist in overcoming some of the challenges. He underscored the need for safeguards and guarantees for private sector investors, including at the national level, drawing parallels between infrastructure development and investments. Prime Minister Saeed highlighted that the country’s oil and gas sector contributes 20% of profits to urban development, despite the current conflict.

Members of the panel then signed the graffiti wall, designed by eight Kenyan girls, depicting the achievement of the SDGs.

**High-Level Interactive Strategic Dialogues**

Creating an enabling environment for innovation: Elin Olsson, Secretary of State, Sweden, emphasized that urban development is site-specific so innovation should be based on local conditions and participatory planning, focusing on multifunctional solutions.

Wallis Goelen, Advisor to Deputy Director General, DG REGIO, European Commission, pointed out that innovation is not “spontaneous,” and a policy framework and enabling conditions are necessary as well as targeted interventions that support bottom-up solutions. She noted that over the next seven years, the EU would provide 370 billion Euros to support innovation, and called for creative monitoring and reporting beyond traditional statistical data, and for social entrepreneurship.

Siraj Sait, University of East London, UK, highlighted the first Global Stakeholder Forum Declaration on a new stakeholder compact for the New Urban Agenda (NUA), aimed at creating an enabling environment for innovative urban solutions.

Irene Campos Gómez, Minister of Housing and Human Settlements, Costa Rica, highlighted a fund for technological innovation aimed at small businesses as well as a virtual solid waste management platform. She cautioned against pushing innovation for the sake of it, seeing it rather as a way to do things differently.

Fatimetou Abdel Malick, President, Nouakchott Regional Council, Mauritania, underscored a people-centered approach at the local and regional levels and noted that rapid unmanaged urbanization increases risks but also provides opportunities for innovation.

Implementation, partnerships, and good practices for cities and communities: Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director, UNEP, drew attention to the need to “capture the attention” of the youth, noting that UNEP is working on improving communication to connect better with local communities, including through local languages.

Basim bin Yacoub Al-Hamer, Minister of Housing, Bahrain, stressed the need to engage with the public to provide innovative solutions to urban challenges. He highlighted the importance of an effective monitoring system in order for governments to take proactive decisions. Stating that “life is full of challenges and limitations,” Al-Hamer called for a stepwise approach to urban development.

Ridwan Kamil, Governor, West Java, Indonesia, underscored the importance of servant-leadership in delivering services to the community, and described West Java’s “Government 3.0” as a model of participatory governance. Underlining the need to prioritize people, he stressed that inclusive collaboration will be the driving force to achieve the NUA and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Noraini Binti Roslan, Mayor, Subang Jaya, Malaysia, stressed that local authorities should not wait for the national government to provide funding, but should rather work through multi-stakeholder partnerships to address community challenges. She highlighted the importance of empowering the people and engaging in new partnerships to create “win-win” solutions.

Cezanne Maherali, Uber, noted that the company has created affordable access to mobility, highlighting that it continues to find innovative ways to decrease costs while fostering sustainability. She described UN-Habitat as the interlocuter.
between governments and the private sector, noting that public-private partnerships could contribute to addressing urban challenges.

Alex Awiti, Vice Provost, The Aga Khan University, Kenya, highlighted that UN-Habitat could play a key role in sharing lessons and best practices to help address rapid urbanization across borders. He pointed to the important role of partnerships between academia and decision makers in development planning.

**Investing in urban innovation for business:** Shimoy Hajare, Youth Representative, Jamaica, called for focusing on: innovation in the context of addressing needs; and youth entrepreneurs in the blue and green economies. She emphasized the importance of apprenticeship to close the skills gap, and urged innovation and creativity in a youth-accessible context. Hajare opined that an inclusive city should provide a space for everyone, and called for more dialogue to encourage investment in youth.

Marina Klemensiewicz, Secretary of Urban Infrastructure, Ministry of Interior, Argentina, highlighted collaboration with UN-Habitat on the elaboration of a first national policy for infrastructure, and outlined new legislation for implementing public-private partnerships, aimed at creating a stable investment environment. She stressed that national governments, other than establishing the necessary frameworks, need to build trust with the private sector and transmit this trust to local governments. Klemensiewicz underscored the importance of collective, multi-stakeholder planning processes to guarantee “at least a certain level of sustainability.”

Ullrich Sierau, Mayor of Dortmund, Germany, highlighted trust and consultation as prerequisites for fostering private sector investment, noting that in the last 20 years 100,000 jobs have been created in Dortmund. He emphasized that, in addition to adequate financial resources, building trust and taking quick decisions are key in a consolidated process of innovation. Sierau called for more inclusive decision-making processes, which take into account youth perspectives, the private sector, and civil society, and encourage innovation, partnership, and action.

James Hanna, Director of Datacenter Community Development, Microsoft, US, noted that investment in strong resilient communities, low carbon technologies, and youth makes business sense and translates into common success metrics. He highlighted the need for an early focus on technology in the education systems, stressing that “technology is just the tool to be used in order to address the human side of the equation.” Hanna called for urgent action to address climate change, rapid urbanization, and poverty, stating that UN-Habitat could be the conduit to facilitate the actions required to deal with these challenges.

Advocating a systemic approach, François Pitti, Director for Innovation, Bouygues, France, highlighted his company’s City Play initiative, which poses the questions: what is your dream for the city; and what does it take to make it happen? He noted that co-designing smart cities with young people provided surprising results, calling for international processes, which listen to youth as part of a cultural revolution. Pitti called on UN-Habitat to link suitable relevant partners to implement sustainable urban policies.

Marc Collins Chen, Co-Founder and CEO, Oceanix, US, explained how his company is partnering with governments to develop floating cities to address sea-level rise and the growth of coastal cities. He proposed that UN-Habitat could play an interesting role in matching startups with pilot cities in need of technology. He underlined the importance of scalable, replicable urban planning policies and actions to create more inclusive, sustainable cities.

**Drafting Committee**

The drafting committee continued its work, addressing draft resolutions on: gender equality to support inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities; UN system-wide guidelines on safer cities; and enhancing urban-rural linkages for sustainable
urbanization and human settlements. A draft resolution on access to and the interrelationship between urban social infrastructure was also briefly discussed, with some delegations expressing concerns on its clarity and budgetary implications, and others noting national consultations would be needed in order to address it.

**Partnership and Pledging Conference**

The Partnership and Pledging Conference, moderated by Julie Gichuru, brought together Member States and a variety of stakeholders, with the aim of providing financial support for UN-Habitat’s approved programmes of work for 2019 and 2020.

Executive Director Sharif called the event a testimony to the global commitment to advance the sustainable urbanization goals. Noting that one third of the SDG targets have an urban component, she emphasized that the total cost of the strategic plan amounts to USD 1.9 billion, with USD 250 million required for 2019 and an equal amount for 2020.

Lars Gronveld, Director-General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission, stressed the need to find innovative ways to strengthen capacities by engaging in the financing agenda and unblocking constraints for urban finance. Irene Campos Gómez, Minister of Housing and Human Settlement, Costa Rica, underscored the importance of preferential loans and capacity building. Naser Khraybut, Kuwait, stressed that contributions go beyond monetary ones, highlighting that “if one is not part of the solution, he/she is part of the problem.”

Armand Roland Pierre Béouindé, Mayor of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, addressed major urban challenges, highlighting the need for financing to strengthen local governments. Alexandre Pinho, Microsoft, Portugal, drew attention to the digital transformation partnership with UN-Habitat, focusing on fit-for-purpose use of available resources, and value added via building partnerships.

During a pledging session, participants announced pledges for non-earmarked, soft-earmarked, and for specific programmes in the 2019 and 2020 programmes of work. Germany, Switzerland, India, Madagascar, Japan, Malawi, Kenya, Morocco, Republic of Congo, China, Sweden, France, South Africa, Nigeria, The Gambia, Colombia, and Poland announced contributions and pledges. The Conference raised over USD 150 million in contributions and commitments.

Executive Secretary Sharif acknowledged the new pledges and contributions in addition to existing contributions from Member States, local governments, and other donors, including civil society organizations and the private sector.

During the Partnerships and Pledging Conference, countries made pledges to specific areas of UN-Habitat’s programme of work and these were highlighted on a large display board to track progress.