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## WUF10 Highlights

### Official Opening Plenary

The opening ceremony began with a live performance of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) national anthem, followed by an opening act by hosts Won Ho and Youssef Abdulbari and a musical performance by the host country.

Falah Mohammad Al Ahabbi, Chairman of the Department of Municipalities and Transport, Abu Dhabi, noted that WUF10 is the first conference of its kind to be held in the Arab region. He pointed to mass migration and technological progress as two trends demanding a “renewed understanding of locality,” which includes safety, inclusiveness and social cohesion.

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, underlined that urbanization continues to feature high rates of inequality, and called for all stakeholders, including local governments, to partner with the UN to tackle the climate emergency.

Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan, said the shared goal for cities to become more compact and sustainable between now and 2050 is threatened by environmental change, a technological revolution, as well as mounting political rivalries and violence. He added that organizational cultures



Falah Mohammad Al Ahabbi, Chairman of the Department of Municipalities and Transport, Abu Dhabi

in “communities of knowledge” was another significant constraint, suggesting that several international organizations were “still reflections of a different world.”

Warning that, “as long as the planet keeps heating, no people will be spared from suffering,” Prime Minister of Fiji Frank Bainimarama emphasized the need to make urban living synonymous with sustainability. He stressed that addressing climate change serves citizens’ interests today, and called on every nation, city and community to join Fiji in achieving net zero emissions by 2050.



The opening ceremony with hosts **Won Ho** and **Youssef Abdulbari**



**Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif commended Abu Dhabi for hosting the first WUF in the Arab Region, highlighting participation by more than 80 ministers, 70 mayors, and 18,000 delegates from 140 nations. Noting that “SDG 11 is where all of the SDGs come together,” she called for turning urbanization into a net positive contributor to life on earth.

Sheikh Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Sharif officially launched WUF10, followed by a video on the WUF10 theme of ‘culture and innovation.’

In further remarks, Ernesto Ottone Ramirez, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), emphasized the contributions of culture to addressing challenges of peace, environmental protection, and migration. Eduardo López Moreno, UN-Habitat, stressed the need to plan for both growing and shrinking cities. Thembi Nkadameng, Mayor of Polokwane, called for strengthening the capacity of local governments to implement the NUA. Elisa Ferreira, European Commission, shared the EU’s progress on building an urban agenda for the EU, developing a people-based definition of cities and settlements, and fostering global city-to-city cooperation. Martha Delgado, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico, and President of the first UN-Habitat Assembly, said the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan seeks to support cities in tackling challenges such as inequality, exclusion, and conflict.



**Elisa Ferreira**, European Commission

### ***Ministerial Roundtable***

In opening remarks, Abdullah Belhaif Al Nuaimi, Minister of Infrastructure Development, UAE, thanked the organizers and attendees for their positive participation in the forum. He noted the need to think both about the future, including trends such as artificial intelligence, and about the past, through bringing our heritage forward. Elisa Ferreira, European Commission, said that culture is being able to live with other ways of thinking and living. She called for people to “open our ears, open our brains, and respect each other,” saying these are the ideas on which the EU was built. Ferreira stressed willingness to cooperate with cities and countries worldwide to share experiences in promoting culture and inclusion in development. UN-Habitat Executive Director Sharif said that balancing innovation and culture will define the future of humanity, calling for ministers to share good practices.

**Panel 1: National updates and engagement: connecting the dots between culture and innovation in cities:** In the first panel, Mexico said the UN-Habitat City Prosperity Index had been implemented in over 300 municipalities across the country. The US spoke of its ‘Opportunity Zone’ programme that seeks to encourage investments in economically depressed areas. Malaysia emphasized that global and national agendas will not succeed if local communities do not understand them or are not empowered to act on them. France called for recognition of historians, archaeologists, and “those who can tell us about the past.” Senegal highlighted the need to ensure digital technologies are in accordance with local cultures and do not weaken social ties. Belgium emphasized the role of public urban spaces, which he called the “living rooms of cities,” to foster cultural cohesion. Colombia said it seeks to preserve and foster the “orange economy,” namely the cultural industry. Afghanistan noted a national decree that recognizes slums as formal settlements. Azerbaijan outlined plans to accommodate Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in cities, and to build low-income housing. Barbados shared its efforts to build a “smart capital” with free wi-fi, a mobile app to share tourist information, and smart parking systems. Ecuador stressed the importance of participative planning processes as sources of cultural innovation. Panama described the work of its new Ministry of Culture and offered to share experiences from its recent economic growth. Uganda noted the success of a system where citizens can lodge complaints about



**Abdullah Belhaif Al Nuaimi**, Minister of Infrastructure Development, United Arab Emirates



Victor Kisob, UN-Habitat

people abusing the environment, even if it does not affect them directly. Mongolia outlined its urban development policy, which seeks to respect its nomadic tradition while developing the tourism industry. Bahrain described the Madinat Khalifa settlement, which drew on sustainable urban planning practices that preserved the original Bahraini culture.

#### **Panel 2: National mechanisms for promoting and financing cultural innovation: challenges and good examples:**

Morocco said a dedicated funding mechanism is essential to ensuring cultural perspectives are taken into account in urban development plans. Bangladesh called for global and regional coordination in cultural heritage preservation efforts. Belarus highlighted efforts to promote smart cities and social housing along with a national standard on environmental protection. Tunisia stressed the importance of connecting cultural inheritance with all housing initiatives. Mauritius said their promotion of housing estates has led to a home ownership rate of 89%, and shared efforts to protect a heritage site located next to an economic zone through an area action plan. Poland highlighted how Katowice, the host city of WUF11, sought to make use of cultural heritage in its urban revitalization efforts. Moldova suggested smart technologies can be leveraged to develop cohesive communities. Burkina Faso said integration and social cohesion, as well as balancing modernity and authenticity, are essential principles for its urban development programmes. In closing remarks, Victor Kisob, UN-Habitat, noted a shared concern with how people give meaning to their lives in urban areas.

#### **Special Session**

**Sustainable Urban Development in the Arab/Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region:** Welcoming participants to the Second Pan-Arab Urban Development Symposium, moderator Nawal Al-Hosany, UAE Permanent Representative to the International Renewable Energy Agency, outlined as region-specific challenges that influence sustainable urbanization and urban resilience: fast population growth; unemployment; human displacement; and vulnerability to climate change and other environmental risks.

Participants watched a video highlighting 12 priorities for Arab urban development, identified at the first Symposium in 2019.

Falah Mohammad Al Ahababi highlighted the UAE's efforts to find innovative solutions to integrate sustainable development into urban planning, stating that success relies on comprehensive strategies and close cooperation among different levels of government.

Reminding that, by 2030, 60% of the world's population will be urban, UN-Habitat Executive Director Sharif called for action to make Arab cities resilient, inclusive and sustainable for all.

Stating that all development happens at the local level, Mounir Tabet, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, identified three necessary partnerships, between: citizens and state; different tiers of government; and all stakeholders. He called for joint planning and implementation, empowering local governments, and facilitating access to best practices.

Mahmoud Sharawi, Minister of Local Development, Egypt, shared his country's experience in promoting local development in rural areas to mitigate urban migration through new economic zones and investment laws, and decentralized planning.

Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Derasat, explained the value added of think tanks in sustainable urban development, in translating science into policy-relevant options. He lamented a lack of focus on urban planning by regional think tanks, and called for more financing to data acquisition to address challenges relating to data availability.

Ayat Soliman, World Bank, called for rethinking financing, identifying as key elements: multi-donor partnerships; maximized local-level revenue collection; transparent fiscal transfers; and incentives for private sector participation, including in post-conflict reconstruction.

Jamila Mohammed Al Fandi, Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme, shared the UAE's experiences in engaging citizens in neighborhood revitalization through social media-based feedback platforms and creating cultural links to enhance a feeling of responsibility.

H.R.H. Princess Lamia bint Majed Al Saud, Al Waleed Philanthropies, identified a rising trend of philanthropic giving and corporate social responsibility within the region's private sector, and called for seizing the opportunity, highlighting her organization's work with children, youth, and women.



Mounir Tabet, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Haoliang Xu, UN Development Programme, identified three areas for cooperation to build back better and attract private financing: de-risking investment, particularly in post-conflict environments; developing a pipeline of bankable projects; and leveraging new sources of finance, such as local or Sharia-compliant bonds.

Maher Johan, Deputy Minister of Planning, Iraq, narrated his government's experience in post-conflict reconstruction, citing as challenges the more than USD 100 billion in infrastructure damage, one million IDPs, and hundreds of thousands of destroyed housing units. He identified setting clear priorities, in partnership with UN agencies and other partners, as critical to success.

Panelists also exchanged views with the audience, including ways to increase knowledge exchanges between Arab countries and how to effectively build trust among stakeholders and decision makers, such as through embedding feedback mechanisms and citizen engagement in project design and implementation.

### **SDGs in Action**

**Launch of the SDG Project Assessment Tool: an innovative tool for inclusive, sustainable and effective urban projects:** Master of ceremonies Klas Roth, UN-Habitat, introduced the SDG Tool that was developed as part of the Global Future Cities Programme, a component of the UK Prosperity Fund, and is based on normative studies from over 500 cities worldwide.

Neil Khor, UN-Habitat, described the tool as a guide to city authorities and delivery partners for more inclusive urban projects. He said it aims to improve the quality of projects in the planning, development and design phases, and to steer participatory discussions between stakeholders.

Lewis Neal, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said cities will be one of the most important sectors in achieving the SDGs, hence the importance of tracking progress in individual urban projects.

As key principles in urban planning, Naomi Hoogervorst, UN-Habitat, identified: integrated urban planning and design at different scales and across different sectors; incentives to promote behavioral shifts in order to increase the use and provision of alternative, sustainable modes of transport; and the efficient use of data that supports evidence-based and justifiable decision-making processes.

The tool was demonstrated in a video, outlining its main steps: tailoring the tool according to the context; assessing the project; discussing the results in a participatory workshop; and seeking expert recommendations provided by UN-Habitat.

Dyfed Aubrey, UN-Habitat, presented a graph illustrating the achievements, according to social, economic and environmental dimensions. He suggested the next decade will be critical for improving city management.

Solola Sefiu, Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency, described challenges of dealing with rapid urbanization in Lagos, emphasizing lack of available data, weak institutions, and poor funding.

Simon Gusah, Future Cities Nigeria, described Lagos as a fundamentally successful city within the country's context, given the constant internal struggle between the government trying to manage rapid urbanization and people migrating to the city slums. He said urban planners need a greater understanding of why people move into slums in order to unlock the hidden opportunities in these areas.

During the ensuing discussion, participants asked questions about: involving UN-Habitat in evaluating cities' SDG achievements; navigating evidence-based planning; getting local-level feedback; and doing baseline mapping.



**Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, **Falah Mohammad Al Ahbabi**, Chairman, Department of Municipalities and Transport, United Arab Emirates, and **Zuraida Kamaruddin**, Minister for Housing and Local Government, Malaysia, preside over the opening of the WUF10 Exhibition.