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WUF12 Highlights: Tuesday, 5 November 2024

High level speakers from around 70 countries, including many cabinet Ministers and city mayors, came together to present their visions for the future and their actions for sustainable cities. The ensuing four-hour roundtable drew high levels of interest and engagement.

In parallel, on-site mural creation, African drumming, and a fashion show using discarded textiles provided color and bustle as WUF12 participants launched into deep, substantive discussions in Dialogues and Special Sessions of the day. The interactive events showcased how individuals are working to improve their neighborhoods, cities and communities in many ways, by, for example, creating inclusive public spaces through street art and working for a zero-waste world. WUF12 participants also delved into ways to address the crisis in housing affordability and reduce cities' carbon emissions.

Among many thought-provoking statements, a quote from a Bronx neighbourhood mural, displayed at one of the special sessions, summed up the day: "You don't have to move out of your neighborhood to live in a better one."

Dialogue 1: Housing Our Future

Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, drew attention to the current historically high gap between people's incomes and housing prices. She noted nations and cities must give attention to land use, especially vacant or underutilized space, understand the accommodation needs of youth and elderly,



Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat



Ni Hong, Minister of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, China, and Sherif El-Sherbiny, Minister of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities, Egypt

and bring together public investments, subsidies, family savings and international finance.

Sherif El-Sherbiny, Minister of Housing, Egypt, highlighted Egypt's experience in filling the gap between its annual 1.5-2 million population increase and the availability of decent and appropriate housing, describing housing rehabilitation to replace slums and development of 38 new cities.

David Harvey, Urban Front, via video, called for organizing against the billionaire class that views housing construction as an investment opportunity for themselves rather than a social provision for those who desperately need it at reasonable cost.

Numerous panelists spoke on their countries' experiences in grappling with the increasing gaps between population growth and adequate housing, highlighting the need for encouraging community autonomy, housing subsidies, and public investment in land for citizens' benefit.

Marie-Josée Houle, Federal Housing Advocate, Canada, spoke on holding governments accountable for realizing the human right to housing, noting the differences between dialogic and litigation purposes, and the role of trust.

Jonathan Reckford, CEO, Habitat for Humanity, prioritized secure tenure rather than legal title, and supported cross-sectoral budgeting, micro-finance for very low-income people and tackling corruption associated with tendering processes for housing construction through an "ecosystem" approach including all levels and sectors.

Others highlighted the challenges of recovering and rebuilding in conflict or post-conflict countries. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, UN



Michal Mlynár, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, bemoaned the difficulties of rebuilding when an occupying force bans entry of materials, as Israel had done in Gaza.

Dialogue 2: Cities and the Climate Crisis

Michal Mlynár, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat, called for upcoming revisions to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to accelerate actions for cities.

Yasmine Fouad, Egypt's Environment Minister, highlighted Egypt's launch at COP27, together with Germany and IUCN, of the Enhancing Nature-based Solutions for an Accelerated Climate Transformation (ENACT) initiative. She said ENACT now involves around 90 countries and aims to coordinate global efforts to address climate change, land and ecosystem degradation, and biodiversity loss. She said Egypt has started integrating climate into its planning processes.

Carlos Moreno, creator of the "15-Minute City" concept, stressed that we are living in a climate emergency, as evidenced by the recent flooding catastrophes in European cities. He pressed for the world to take up his concept of "proxilience—"proximity" as the best strategy for strengthening urban resilience—to reduce spatial and temporal injustices arising from ever-expanding cities.



View of a panel during Dialogue 2



Carlos Moreno, IAE Paris Sorbonne University

A panel of speakers featuring public sector and international organization representatives then discussed critical capacity gaps in city planning and landscape architecture, innovative insurance types to mitigate livelihood losses due to extreme weather events, nature-based solutions as the future of city planning, and cities as the vulnerable frontlines in the climate crisis. A second panel then covered mainstreaming of climate action in city governance, capacity enhancement approaches rather than capacity building; ways of integrating traditional knowledge with dominant scientific knowledge, and the need to ensure more adaptation and climate change-related funding makes its ways to cities.

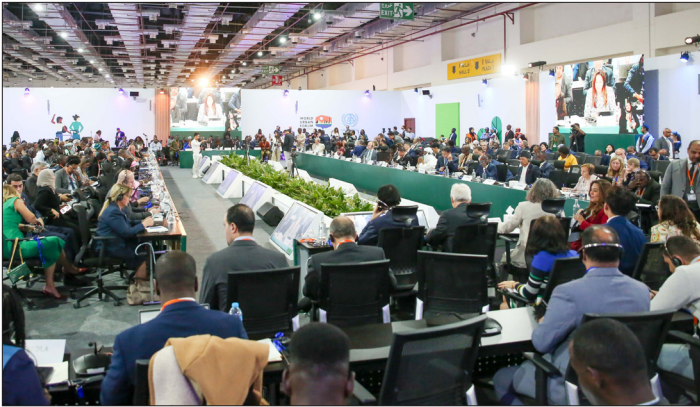
Kobby Bomareo, Papua New Guinea Housing Minister, in his concluding remarks, noted his country is facing an increase in informal urban developments as residents of low-lying atolls flee the impacts of sea level rise.

Ministerial Roundtable

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach set the stage by reiterating the need to build 900,000 houses per year globally until 2030 in order to address the housing crisis, and recalled that WUF12 is happening within the context of the adoption of the Pact for the Future. Egypt's Minister of Local Development, Manal Awad, spoke of her country's efforts to decentralize and support subnational governments' efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Launching into 3-minute blocks per speaker, several countries reiterated their support for both the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the New Urban Agenda. Many developing countries reiterated that their efforts to help cities mitigate and adapt to climate change are happening despite their significant financial barriers, and outlined their national strategies to ensure funding reaches subnational governments. Some countries identified public-private partnerships as key to their sustainable urbanization strategies.

Nepal highlighted it was working with UN-Habitat in over 700 municipalities to address unplanned urban growth. South Africa noted its multistakeholder approach, including academia to ensure solutions are evidence-based and can be sustainable. Malaysia outlined that 80% of their population is expected to be



View of the room during the Ministerial Roundtable

urban by 2030, which can help with service efficiencies, but can also exacerbate housing affordability issues. Malawi spoke of their efforts to make sure investments not only meet the needs of today, but are forward-thinking for the future.

Azerbaijan indicated it would launch an initiative at COP29 in Baku in a few weeks that would look to address the interlinked challenges of urbanization and climate and to build synergies between COPs and WUFs. Palestine noted the great challenge it faces in looking to build back better in the future. Lithuania noted its municipalities lead modernization programs based on sustainable urban planning principles, with use of organic buildings and improving energy efficiency. Spain expressed support for policies that can help cities severely impacted by climate change, including Valencia, recover fully.

The link to watch the whole roundtable can be found here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1xelwly5a>

Special Session: The Heartbeat of the City

Eliza Anyangwe, CNN, moderated this session.

Anna Jerlmyr, former Mayor of Stockholm, defined quality of life as everything governments strive for in serving their citizens and underscored the value of human-centered design.

Ruth Dreifuss, former president of Switzerland, emphasized participatory decision-making and government accountability to avoid cities making people sick.

Norah AlYusuf, Saudi Arabia, called for focusing on peoples' needs; health-responsive infrastructure; resilient housing; and data-driven investment in quality of life.

Paul Kalbfleisch, author, stressed urban design that creates collective joy, which, he said, would make cities and their residents more resilient.

Nathalie Roebbel, Lead, Urban Health, WHO, said a strategic approach to public health benefits other sectors, calling for participatory budgeting and legislation on collaboration.

Other speakers highlighted their countries' experiences in improving quality of life, noting that design criteria should incorporate gender considerations; rapid city growth can risk loss of identity; funding for urban planning is generally top-down but bottom-up participation creates a mindset change; cities can be more breathable by bringing nature in; and "healthy city" strategies need continual updating.

Special Session: Zero Waste World

Ben Brown and Ciara Doyle, co-founders, Going Green Media, hosted the session, which began with a fashion show by the Egyptian Clothing Bank, showing dresses made from waste textiles, to a music soundtrack played on instruments also made from waste materials.

Betty Osei Bonsu, Green Africa Youth Organization, Uganda, recalled sustainable practices of the past, which were adopted based on necessity. She stressed that individual choices are essential in achieving a zero-waste world, noting however that governments also bear responsibility.

Shahira Amin, independent journalist, Cairo, introduced the panelists and moderated the discussion.

Benedict Jasper Lagman, City Vice-Mayor of San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, and President, Zero Waste Cities Network, Philippines, described efforts to introduce a national zero waste policy, establishing materials recovery facilities (MRFs) in every village, and partnering with NGOs that have technical expertise, noting that waste reduction cannot be achieved solely through government policies.

José Manuel Moller, CEO and Founder, Algramo, introduced his company's efforts to promote the use of prefilled and refillable containers. He stressed that, "people cannot decide between the planet and their pockets; reuse must be cheaper."

Farima Tidjani, Founder, Adansonia Green, Senegal, highlighted waste assessment as essential, noting that her organization had found 95% of street waste in her locality was plastic and 50-75% of household waste was organic. She described her efforts to promote reuse of containers among market and street vendors and to make compost as an educational activity for schoolchildren and their communities. She stressed that the neighbourhood waste pickers are unrecognized experts.

Manal Saleh, Founder and CEO, Egyptian Clothing Bank, highlighted the need to "re-utilize" used textiles, in addition to promoting "reduce, reuse, recycle and refuse", for example, by washing and re-dyeing hard-to-recycle textiles, such as hair scrunchies and underwear.

Rizk Yosif Hana, El Tatweer El Motagaded (Garbage Collectors) Association, Egypt, called on governments to



View of a panel during the Special Session: The Heartbeat of the City

treat neighborhood garbage collectors on par with the large multinationals, and not only as sub-contractors, arguing that the small operators nevertheless are able to carry out 100% of recycling activities.

Special Session: A Space for All

Laura Petrella, Chief of Planning, Finance and Economy Section, UN-Habitat, highlighted UN-Habitat’s commitment to supporting universal access to safe, green and accessible public spaces, noting the creation of 137 such spaces in 90 cities to date, reaching 2.3 million people, and invited all to visit the newly-opened Al Asmarat public space in Cairo.

The session then launched with an interactive experience, in which participants clapped along to African drums, led by curators from the Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH), Kenya, who then explained the value of art and culture in public spaces for building community and friendship.

Bahia Shebhab, artist, designer and professor, American University, Cairo, presented examples of art installations she had created, including a pyramid of garbage built in a Cairo dump, and alternative “heaven and hell” experiences of climate change at the 2022 Sharm el-Sheikh Climate Change Conference.

Ethan Kent, Executive Director, Placemaking X, spoke about how public art can support an inclusive culture as “everyone feels they can be part of the narrative,” showing examples from cities in Qatar, the US, and Portugal.

Suhailey Farzana, community architect, Bangladesh, said when the people lead the design process it becomes their own, “effecting a common dream collectively.” She encouraged involving children and creating a “listening” platform where the community presents the design to the authorities.

Emin Huseynov, Special Representative of the President, Azerbaijan, spoke on inclusive collaboration to recreate public spaces in Azerbaijan to sustain its cultural heritage as an enduring legacy and as a model for other countries recovering from conflict.

Jyoti Hosagrahar, Deputy Director, World Heritage Center, UNESCO, noted the importance of tools such as the UNESCO



Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

urban heritage atlas as a technical aid for the implementation of UNESCO’s 2011 Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Recommendation. Pointing to examples of different community spaces in Peru, Morocco and Tanzania, she stressed that fostering a wide range of traditional occupations and practices can contribute to inclusive economic benefits.

A panel of speakers discussed characteristics of public spaces and their interaction with cultural and creative activities. They noted the value in considering the range of spaces from the waterfront to inland neighborhoods, and from large to small, as each space serves a different community—highlighting that the quality of public spaces is at least as important as their size. They also pointed to listening to people in communities as being a critical factor in design, particularly to avoid overburdening public finances, as engaging communities can mobilize resources from within a community.

Matt Cottam, founder and principal designer, Tellart, presented his “technology-forward” interactive exhibits, and visual artists Luis Alberto and Victor Mwangi spoke of their experiences as urban street artists and using their art to break stereotypes and reflect their identities.



Ethan Kent, Placemaking X



Jyoti Hosagrahar, Deputy Director, World Heritage Center, UNESCO