

A publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Monday, 18 May 2026 | Online at: [enb.iisd.org/world-urban-forum-wuf13](https://enb.iisd.org/world-urban-forum-wuf13)

## WUF13 Highlights: Sunday, 17 May 2026

Ahead of the official opening of the thirteenth World Urban Forum (WUF13) on Monday, a High-level Ministerial Roundtable offered an opportunity for Ministers and other national representatives to outline priorities for the upcoming mid-term review of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and to discuss the role of housing for social inclusion, urban prosperity and opportunities for all, as well as environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development.

The WUF Assemblies convened their joint opening session before splitting into separate sessions for governments, youth, businesses, civil society organizations, and women to share urban sustainability experiences and discuss solutions to challenges ranging from infrastructure to climate justice.

This report covers the ministerial roundtable and thematic panels, the Joint Opening of the WUF Assemblies, and two Assembly meetings that took place during the day.

### Ministerial Meeting

**High-level meeting on the New Urban Agenda:** Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture of Azerbaijan and National WUF13 Coordinator, said the meeting would bring together global perspectives and national and local experiences of implementing the NUA. He noted that the Chair's Summary of the Ministerial meeting will be provided to the UN General Assembly to inform its review of NUA implementation.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach said the NUA has achieved real progress since its launch in 2016, with more than two-thirds of NUA countries having introduced national housing policies, but she noted implementation of those



Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee on Urban Planning and Architecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan and National Coordinator of WUF13

policies had been uneven. She called for greater action in the coming decade on housing affordability, which is affecting all regions, often impacting the most vulnerable.

In a video message delivered on behalf of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Guy Bernard Ryder, UN Under-Secretary General for Policy, stressed that achieving adequate, safe, and affordable housing requires stronger partnerships, effective multilateral governance, and improved access to finance. Noting that one in four people live in informal settlements or slums, he underscored the crucial role of marginalized voices for urban sustainability and inclusivity.

Krzysztof Szczerski, Permanent Representative of Poland to the UN, stated that while cities are centers of economic opportunity, innovation, and resilience, they continue to face increasingly complex urban conflicts, including growing pressure on infrastructure and basic services.



Delegates pose for a group photo during the Opening Segment



Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat



Krzysztof Szczerski, Poland

Nga Kor Ming, President, UN Habitat Assembly, stressed that affordable housing is a cornerstone of sustainable development that governments can implement at national and local levels.

**Statements:** MALAYSIA stressed the importance of prioritizing housing for first-time house buyers and youth and turning housing estates into “resilient ecosystems.”

AZERBAIJAN highlighted the importance of territorial planning, noting that 68 of its 79 cities developed urban plans that prioritize sustainable building standards.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO said planned urban corridors will aid in relieving Kinshasa’s city center from pressure caused by immigration and promote inclusive housing options for a growing middle class. He stressed the need for greater international collaboration on concessional financing for urban infrastructure.

Noting that over 150,000 homes have been destroyed from “military aggression by the US-Zionist war,” IRAN stressed that the reconstruction of war-damaged areas with smart and resilient urban design is his country’s greatest urban policy priority.

KIRIBATI noted constraints preventing faster NUA implementation, including limited technical capacity and targeted support to help countries access climate development finance for resilient housing solutions.

LITHUANIA urged cities to deliver coherent and sustainable solutions that reflect local needs, such as expanding non-market

housing solutions that prevent people from being “priced out of their house or their city.”

CUBA explained that staying resilient under 60 years of blockade required prioritizing an urban agenda that focuses on multi-level actions, including capacity building for public servants in municipalities, comprehensive territorial planning, and a focus on climate adaptation based on local considerations.

SUDAN noted that rebels and militias target infrastructure, causing a humanitarian crisis and challenging the country’s capacity to provide safe and sustainable cities. He noted efforts to reestablish electricity, water and other services, a proposed project to build one million houses, and a new peace initiative to end the conflict.

MEXICO emphasized her country’s push for inclusive urbanization focused on people as a cornerstone for sustainable development. She urged basing the Baku call to action on a human rights framework, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and eliminating discrimination of women.

MOROCCO highlighted its vision for human-centered cities and policies that have reduced slums and organized social housing.

NORTH MACEDONIA underscored work towards a coherent national vision in dialogue with municipalities, universities, and citizens.



Members of the media



Nga Kor Ming, President, UN Habitat Assembly

PAKISTAN said natural disasters are also a crisis of justice and urged focusing the Baku call to action on removing unjust speculation from housing solutions and treating affordable housing as a right, not a welfare instrument.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC underscored the need for quality data to inform urban planning. SRI LANKA said public-private partnerships must be part of efforts to rebuild after disasters, such as a recent cyclone that destroyed 6,000 homes in the country. The STATE OF PALESTINE called for international support for affordable housing construction to rebuild shattered communities. TUVALU noted that its experience with NUA implementation showed the need to simplify access to climate finance and prevent siloed delivery mechanisms.

**Housing for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty:** Keynote speaker, Edna Elena Vega Rangel, Secretary, Agrarian, Territorial, and Urban Development, Mexico, noted that adequate, affordable housing shapes dignity and is a human right. She highlighted that Mexico strengthened its housing policies using lessons learned from earlier investment in inexpensive land without adequate services.

Participants discussed experiences with social funding programs for low-income areas; unlocking private investment in accommodation after opening land ownership; the role of housing policy as a vehicle for accelerating social inclusion and addressing gender inequality; ensuring that housing policy considers the needs of elderly and disabled people; and the private sector's role in affordable housing production.

**Housing for urban prosperity and opportunities for all:** Keynote speaker Somsook Boonyabanha, Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, highlighted housing as a powerful social and economic investment. Boonyabanha said that housing investments should be done at scale with flexible financing and through open processes enabling cooperation across sectors.

Panel participants stressed: the need to align policy frameworks at national and local levels; treating housing investment as an investment in growth; prioritizing the needs of children; connecting housing and economic policies and pursuing solutions led by and that benefit the poorest residents.

**Housing for environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development:** Keynote speaker Edgar Pieterse, Director of African Centre for Cities, underscored that climate change is fundamentally an inclusive development issue. He urged leaders to put decarbonization at the center of development and to recognize power asymmetries in financing.

Participants' interventions focused on: efficiencies in housing policy; water as a critical resource for sustainable cities; national

and local policy alignments; data sharing and expertise; and the threats that climate change poses to human life. Ampelosa Manoa Tehulu, Minister of Public Works, Infrastructure Development and Water, Tuvalu, underscored the urgent need for a financial system that addresses land solutions, "because without land we cannot do anything further with housing."

**Closing:** Rafael Tuts, Director, Global Solutions Division of UN-Habitat, said deliberations will inform the Chair's summary and the Baku call to action, and help sharpen a collective understanding of what must change to accelerate NUA implementation. Summarizing the meeting, Chair Guliyev said deliberations emphasized that housing must remain at the center of urban policies and political commitments, highlighting progress in legal and planning frameworks for sustainable urbanization, large-scale housing programs, infrastructure investments, upgrading of informal settlements, and climate-responsive planning. He said interventions underscored that housing cannot be addressed in isolation, identifying the need to connect housing with land, infrastructure, climate action, jobs, and local climate development.

### WUF Assemblies

**Joint Opening of the Assemblies:** Moderator Aditya Kumar, UN-Habitat, framed the Assembly as an opportunity to co-create solutions for current crises and urged participants to carry home the messages emerging from the conversations.

Anar Guliyev, National Coordinator of WUF13, stressed that all groups in society must have a role in urban development, emphasizing the need for gender equality and youth involvement in shaping cities and the private sector's role in sparking innovation.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach urged stakeholders to use the moment to inform urban policies, including the NUA mid-term review. She called for youth to share ideas for the future and emphasized the importance of adequate housing for gender equality.

Clara Brugada, Mayor of Mexico City, which will host WUF14 in 2028, underscored the need to build cities that take care of vulnerable groups and highlighted connections between social inequalities, the climate emergency, and the housing crisis.

Assembly participants emphasized, among other issues, onboarding youth perspectives in policymaking; strengthening relationships between the poor and those in power; seeing sustainability as the future of business products; the connection



The delegation from Eswatini

between safe housing and women's access to opportunity, health, and education.

**Women's Assembly:** Putting gender at the center of urban sustainability and development, the Women's Assembly foregrounded connections between thriving societies and the full participation and empowerment of women.

Opening a panel on "Co-creating gender-transformative strategies for all women and girls," Amna Bint Ahmed Al Rumaihi, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, Bahrain, highlighted the increasing role that women play in sustainable development in Bahrain, including at the ministry level and in developing safe housing.

Bahar Muradova, chairperson of the State Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, underscored the need for people-centered urban development that creates equal opportunities for women and pointed to Baku as a model city that promotes safety, accessibility, and sustainable solutions.

Speaking on behalf of UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous, Kaori Ishikawa, UN Women Representative to Georgia and Liaison for the South Caucasus, stressed the need for safe, accessible urban spaces. She underscored gender-based violence as the primary driver of housing insecurity.

Noting that poor lighting and unsafe public transport limit women's mobility, safety, and access to resources, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of Mauritius, called for intentional design, inclusive economic opportunities, and including women in urban decision-making.

Inés Sánchez De Madariaga, UNESCO Chair on Gender, stressed that building inclusive urban futures requires moving beyond representing women as vulnerable groups and recognizing that they are leaders of urban transformation.

The Women's Assembly continued in breakout groups discussing, among other issues, access to adequate housing, women networks and access to decision-making, financing housing, climate resilient housing, and gender equality in informal settlements.

**World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments:** Pablo Fernández Marmissolle-Daguerre, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), highlighted both the upcoming review of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) within the framework of the NUA and the crucial work of the Global

Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments to center local leadership at the heart of multilateralism.

Nga Kor Ming, President, UN-Habitat Assembly and Minister of Housing and Local Government (Malaysia), described his country's People Residential Program, which has provided over 100,000 housing units for low-income households, contributing to the development of integrated communities and economic opportunities.

Sébastien Vauzelle, Head of the Local2030 Coalition Secretariat, said action to achieve global goals begins in cities and regions.

Uğur İbrahim Altay, Mayor, Konya Metropolitan Municipality, Türkiye, said just housing requires treating housing as a public good rather than a commodity and suggested that the NUA mid-term review address barriers to implementation, such as weak decentralization, constrained fiscal space, and the financialization of housing and land.

Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul, The Gambia, said local and regional governments are co-creators and custodians of a new social contract, underscoring that the future of multilateralism is place-based and grounded in care.

Jan van Zanen, Mayor of The Hague, the Netherlands, said active collaboration approaches such as his city's new safe streets approach, which allows residents to report locations where they feel unsafe due to poor lighting or neglected public safety, help restore trust between local communities and global institutions.

Clara Brugada, Mayor of Mexico City, described international municipalism as a political movement of territories uniting to ensure that local voices reach the places that will have impact. She lamented the consequences of financializing, including increased housing costs, gentrification, and evictions, suggesting countering them through community-led urban transformation, positioning communities as protagonists of transformation that are close to the ground "and can see the pain of our people."

Following these interventions, participants heard from mayors, coalitions of local and regional governments, and non-governmental organizations discussing topics including: strengthening multilevel democratic governance; unblocking funding opportunities through alliances between regions and peer-to-peer learning; centering care as the cornerstone for housing justice and gender equality; the right to the city as a right to the valorization of local culture; and the recognition of local governance in conflict areas.



The delegation from Oman