

Summary of the Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly: 5-9 June 2023

“UN-Habitat is back!” proclaimed UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif after delegates unanimously approved the Ministerial Declaration and 10 resolutions during the final day of the Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly (UNHA2). These outcomes set the organization’s marching orders for the next four years.

In the Ministerial Declaration, titled “A Sustainable Urban Future through Inclusive and Effective Multilateralism: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Times of Global Crisis,” Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the [New Urban Agenda](#) (NUA) and its implementation plan, and endorsed the role of UN-Habitat as the United Nations’ focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements. They committed themselves to strengthening UN-Habitat and to advancing multilateral engagement and international cooperation on a range of urban and housing issues, including the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Delegates adopted resolutions addressing:

- international guidelines on people-centered smart cities;
- accelerating the transformation of informal settlements and slums by 2030;
- World Cleanup Day;
- biodiverse and resilient cities;
- enhancing the interlinkage between urbanization and climate change resilience;
- localization of SDGs;
- adequate housing for all;
- urban planning and sustainable infrastructure;
- creation of a human settlements resilience framework; and
- equitable financing and effective monitoring of the implementation of UNHA2 resolutions.

This final resolution creates an urban action funding window within the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation to attract and manage funds from donors to fund the implementation of the UNHA resolutions. It also calls for the creation of a system for tracking the status of the implementation of Assembly resolutions.

The Assembly also adopted five decisions, one of which extends UN-Habitat’s Strategic Plan for 2020-2023 until 2025 to align UN-Habitat’s planning cycle with the UN quadrennial comprehensive policy review process. Another decision agrees to resume UNHA2 for two days in May 2025 with a view to adopting a strategic plan for 2026-2029, and possibly UN-Habitat’s stakeholder engagement policy if the Executive Board has it ready by then.

UNHA2 convened in hybrid format at the UN Office in Nairobi (UNON) in Kenya from 5-9 June 2023. Over 3,400 participated in-person, including 52 ministers and 37 deputy ministers, and over 2,000 participated online.

A Brief History of UN-Habitat

Origins of UN-Habitat

On 1 January 1975, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) established the UN Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation, the first official UN body dedicated to urbanization with the task of assisting national programmes relating to human settlements through

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the provision of capital and technical assistance, particularly in developing countries.

Habitat I: The First UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I) took place in Vancouver, Canada, from 31 May to 11 June 1976. It resulted in the creation, on 19 December 1977, of the precursors of UN-Habitat: the UN Commission on Human Settlements and the UN Centre for Human Settlements.

Habitat II: The Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) convened in Istanbul, Türkiye, from 3-14 June 1996, on the 20th anniversary of the first Habitat Conference. The Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, adopted by the Conference, outlined more than 100 commitments and strategies to address shelter and sustainable human settlements. With the adoption of the Habitat Agenda, the international community set itself the twin goals of achieving adequate shelter for all and ensuring the sustainable development of human settlements. Habitat II also reaffirmed the commitment to the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate housing.

56th UNGA: UNGA 56 adopted [resolution 56/206](#) in 2001, transforming the Centre into a direct subsidiary of the UNGA, the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and the Commission into the 58-member Governing Council of UN-Habitat.

New Mandates

UN Sustainable Development Summit: The Summit took place from 25-27 September 2015 at UN Headquarters in New York and adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), which includes 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets. SDG 11 addresses urban areas, aiming to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” The Goal contains targets to, by 2030:

- ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums;
- provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons;
- enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization, and capacity for participatory, integrated, and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries;
- reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality, and municipal and other waste management; and
- provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green, and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Habitat III: Convened in Quito, Ecuador, from 17-20 October 2016, Habitat III was one of the first UN global summits after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change. It offered an opportunity to discuss the important challenge of how cities, towns and villages are planned and managed, to fulfill their role as drivers of sustainable development, and hence shape the implementation of new global development and climate change goals. Member States agreed and signed the NUA, an action-oriented document, which sets global standards for achieving SDG 11, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities.

UN-Habitat Assembly

UNGA 73: In an effort to strengthen the organizational structure of UN-Habitat, UNGA 73 adopted [resolution 73/239](#) on December 2018, deciding to dissolve the Governing Council as a UNGA

subsidiary body and to replace it with the UN-Habitat Assembly (UNHA).

First Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly: Held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 27-31 May 2019, UNHA1 set the organizational components necessary for the Assembly’s functioning, approved UN-Habitat’s Strategic Plan for the period 2020-2023, and adopted resolutions on: safer cities and human settlements; capacity building for the implementation of the NUA and the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda; gender equality to support inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements; and enhancing urban-rural linkages for sustainable urbanization.

UNGA 76 High-level Meeting to Assess Progress on the Implementation of the NUA: UNGA 76 held a high-level meeting on 22 April 2022. The meeting found that the world is far off track to meet SDG 11 and Member States pledged to report on progress for the 2026 Quadrennial Report. A “Group of Friends of UN-Habitat, Sustainable Urbanization, and the New Urban Agenda” was launched to provide political support to UN-Habitat, its mandate, and the NUA.

UN-Habitat Assembly Report

UN-Habitat Assembly President Román Meyer Falcón (Mexico) welcomed delegates to the session on Monday, 5 June, calling for innovative and bold collective efforts to develop approaches to fulfill the objectives of the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan and provide better human settlements for all.

Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director-General, UNON, noted the long partnership between UN-Habitat and UNON, and the importance of Nairobi for the UN system and the 2030 Agenda.

In a video address, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said the COVID-19 pandemic left more than half of the world behind in achieving the 2030 Agenda and to reverse this trend “we must fight for the future we want.” UN Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Li Junhua said that UNHA2 discussions should set the path for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to review SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and pave the way for the September 2023 SDG Summit to make the breakthroughs needed to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

UNGA President Csaba Kőrösi (Hungary) said cities are the epicenter of planetary crises and urged new, bold, and innovative commitments based on scientific inputs.

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, underscored that inequity and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are felt first and foremost in cities and noted the Paris Agreement’s aspirations can only be achieved if sustainable urbanization is prioritized. She acknowledged the completion of the first phase of UN-Habitat’s governance structure and encouraged delegates to extend its Strategic Plan by two years.

Slumber Tsogwane, Vice President, Botswana, recognized UN-Habitat’s role in advancing sustainable urbanism for inclusive, connected, and prosperous communities. He noted African Member States are working together to advance the concept of resilient and sustainable cities and an African energy agenda. He underscored the importance of access to jobs, cautioning that sustainable urbanization will not come without detailed economic transformation.

In his keynote address, President William Ruto, Kenya, outlined his country’s flagship initiative to deliver affordable and sustainable housing by 2030 as part of an overarching policy framework linking basic social services, sustainable energy and transport, green spaces,

and waste management. Highlighting parallels with the global affordable housing shortfall for an estimated 3 billion people by 2030, Ruto expressed concern that the current financial architecture is undermining progress on SDG 11. He urged the Assembly to strengthen UN-Habitat's capacity to lead a multilateral agenda for inclusive, safe, sustainable, and resilient human settlements. Ruto then declared the Assembly officially open.

Johnson Arthur Sakaja, Governor, Nairobi City County, Kenya, emphasized the urgency to develop specific action plans to ensure cities are more sustainable and resilient and the role of local governments in these plans. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), highlighted the importance of partnership and collaboration between UNEP and UN-Habitat, particularly regarding the role of urban centers in plastics pollution. Fatimetou Abdel Malick, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), called for a redoubling of efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda and emphasized the role of regional and local governments in achieving the SDGs.

Executive Director Sharif stressed that SDGs are the bedrock of effective multilateral results. She expressed hope that UNHA2 can contribute to the new social contract called for by the UN Secretary-General and that the Summit of the Future in 2024 and World Social Summit in 2025 will advance housing rights as part of that contract.

Organizational Matters

On Monday, delegates adopted the provisional agenda ([HSP/HA.2/1](#) and [1/Add.1](#)) with adjustments in agenda items 11 (Strategic Plan) and 13 (next UNHA) to reflect the need for UNHA2 to discuss decisions to: extend the current Strategic Plan until 2025; hold a resumed UNHA2 in 2025; approve a new strategic plan; and convene UNHA3 in 2029.

President Meyer proposed the organization of work, which was approved without objection. Delegates approved the creation of a Committee of the Whole (COW), chaired by Damptey Bediako Asare (Ghana), to discuss in detail agenda items on UN-Habitat activities, implementation of the NUA and the 2030 Agenda, World Urban Forum (WUF) reports, strategic plan of UN-Habitat for 2024-2027, as well as any resolutions forwarded by an *ad hoc* open-ended Drafting Committee, chaired by Saqlain Syedah (Pakistan).

High-level Segment

Heads of States Dialogue: In an interactive discussion segment on Monday, Moderator Eleni Giokos, CNN, invited President Ruto to outline his affordable housing vision. President Ruto also discussed his views on the climate agenda. A summary of this discussion can be found [here](#).

First Ladies High Level Dialogue on “Women Shaping Cities and Communities”: This session featured presentations by Executive Director Sharif and the First Lady of Kenya, Rachel Ruto, and a moderated discussion with both, plus video presentations by the First Lady of Botswana, Neo Jane Masisi, and the First Lady of Türkiye, Emine Erdoğan. Two representatives of the Kenyan organization, Joyful Women, also provided testimony on how the organization helped empower them. A summary of this discussion can be found [here](#).

Thematic High-level Sessions

High-level Session on Climate Change and Migration Crises in Urban Areas: The first thematic high-level session on Monday acknowledged that climate and migration crises are compounded in cities and human settlements, cautioning that poor planning can exacerbate vulnerability. The session stressed the need for inclusive and effective multilateralism, sustainable urban planning and

working with vulnerable communities to create resilient, equitable, and prosperous cities. A summary of the session can be found [here](#).

High-level Session on Universal Access to Adequate Housing: The second thematic high-level session on Tuesday focused on the right to housing, and the role of “inclusive and stronger multilateralism” in realizing this aspiration. Echoing an assertion by Moderator Shipra Narang-Suri, UN-Habitat, that slow progress in advancing the right to adequate housing “is a structural failure of our systems to deliver on the most fundamental promise to humanity,” the discussions underscored that while a comprehensive international framework on adequate housing exists, stronger multilateral and inclusive platforms are needed to operationalize it. A summary of the session can be found [here](#).

High-level Session on SDG Localization and Financing: At the third thematic high-level session on Thursday, panelists discussed mechanisms for closing financing gaps, and the importance of localization for effective change. Key takeaways included: a deeper understanding of the various aspects, processes and benefits associated with SDG localization; opportunities, mechanisms, and schemes for overcoming financing barriers; and defining characteristics of attractive financial environments for investment. A summary of the Session's discussion can be found [here](#).

Report of the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

On Monday, Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) Chair Saqlain Syedah (Pakistan) introduced the report of the CPR ([HSP/HA/2/2](#)). She outlined the outcomes of the first Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR-1) meeting in June 2021 to prepare for a high-level midterm review of the Strategic Plan, and review progress achieved in the implementation of UNHA1 decisions and resolutions. She noted four recommendations calling for, *inter alia*: strengthened linkages between UN-Habitat's operational and normative activities to increase the impact of its work in support of sustainable and inclusive recovery; and preparation of voluntary reviews by local and regional governments and building connections with voluntary national reviews. Syedah highlighted 13 draft resolutions and decisions considered by the recently concluded OECPR-2 meeting in preparation for UNHA2. Delegates adopted the CPR report.

Adoption of the Report of the Executive Board

On Monday, Executive Board Chair Silvio Albuquerque (Brazil) introduced the report of the Executive Board's intersessional work ([HSP/HA.2/3](#)), highlighting key outcomes. He noted that despite considerable efforts, the Board's *ad hoc* working group on the draft stakeholder engagement policy did not conclude its work and offered proposals to the Assembly on a way forward. Delegates adopted the report of the Board.

Activities of UN-Habitat, including Coordination Matters

On Monday, Executive Director Sharif introduced the documents for this agenda item ([HSP/HA.2/4](#), [Add.1/Rev.1](#), [Add.2](#) and [Add.4](#)) and underscored that UN-Habitat's mandate has strengthened since 2019. Delegates agreed to refer this item to the COW for further discussion.

In the COW on Tuesday, Michal Mlynár, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat, re-introduced the documents. The Secretariat then provided an overview of key results and achievements across seven key areas: a new organizational structure to deliver integrated urban solutions; implementation of resolutions and decisions adopted by UNHA1; NUA implementation; UN system-wide coordination on sustainable urbanization; collaboration with

intergovernmental and international organizations; COVID-19 response and recovery; and normative guidance for catalytic impact.

On implementation of resolutions and decisions adopted at UNHA1, he highlighted:

- implementing the Strategic Plan in 86 countries;
- piloting an urban safety monitoring framework;
- launching an online capacity-building course on the NUA; and
- establishing the Centre for Urban Rural Linkages in Africa, the Local 2030 coalition and other issue-based networks.

Among other achievements, he highlighted initiating the UN Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities to promote a people-centered approach to urban digital development; and co-convening the first Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 27th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27).

Review of Progress in the Implementation of the NUA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

During Monday plenary Executive Director Sharif introduced her report ([HSP/HA.2/5](#)) and the report by the UNGA President on the outcome of the high-level UNGA meeting to assess progress in the implementation of the NUA ([HSP/HA.2/INF/3](#)). Cautioning that not enough countries have submitted progress on NUA implementation, she called this a lost opportunity to track sustainable urbanization. Delegates agreed to refer this agenda item to the COW for further discussion.

In the COW on Tuesday, the Secretariat presented progress implementing the NUA and the 2030 Agenda, highlighting: the NUA's transformative potential, including as a framework to achieve sustainable urbanization; a concern regarding low progress on NUA implementation; and a call to analyze obstacles to implementation. She noted efforts on housing, environment, the urban crisis, urban prosperity and inclusion, and finance and localization. Pointing to an upcoming SDG 11 Synthesis Report to the HLPF, she expressed concern that only approximately 40 national NUA reports were submitted and proposed aligning NUA reporting to national urban policies and fora.

The US suggested coordinating meetings to present NUA progress. FRANCE noted it was working on its NUA report for submission later in 2023.

Report on the World Urban Forum

On Monday, Executive Director Sharif introduced the Executive Director's report on WUF10 and WUF11 ([HSP/HA.2/6](#)). She announced WUF12 will take place in Cairo, Egypt, from 4-8 November 2024. The agenda item was referred to the COW.

In the COW on Tuesday, Deputy Executive Director Mlynár reintroduced the documents. Malgorzata Jarosinska-Jedynak, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, Poland, reported on WUF11, noting delegates from 155 countries, with 11,000 onsite and 6,000 online attendees. She said WUF11 prioritized accessibility so that visually and physically impaired participants could fully engage in the agenda and venue and pointed to 40 crisis-related events to help cities respond to natural and manmade disasters.

The Secretariat noted legacy WUF initiatives, including alumni advocacy networks, and financing and knowledge-sharing, notably the Legacy Fund and the City Investment Facility. On WUF12 preparations, the Secretariat noted a high-level organizing committee chaired by the Egyptian Prime Minister and engagement opportunities at the July 2023 HLPF and September 2023 SDG Summit.

The US requested information on the WUF theme and ensuring preparatory sessions are convened in hybrid or recorded format to enhance access.

Dialogue on the Special Theme for the Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly

On Tuesday, the Secretariat introduced the Executive Director's report on the special theme for the Assembly, "A Sustainable Urban Future Through Inclusive and Effective Multilateralism: Achieving the SDGs in Times of Global Crises" ([HSP/HA.2/7](#)). Pointing to the UN Secretary-General's [Our Common Agenda report](#), he indicated it recognizes the transformative potential of cities. He noted eight pathways to support a sustainable urban future, such as: adequate housing as a right; integrated climate and biodiversity action; inclusive urban recovery frameworks; vertical and horizontal coordination and SDG localization; and an increased fiscal space. He stressed that cities should be heard in multilateral fora, including the HLPF and the SDG Summit.

The High-level Interactive Dialogue on the special theme was held on Wednesday. A summary of the Dialogue can be found [here](#).

Strategic Plan of UN-Habitat

During Tuesday's plenary, the Secretariat introduced the Executive Director's report about the proposed extension of the current Strategic Plan for the period 2020-2023 through 2024-2025 ([HSP/HA.2/8](#)), as well as the midterm evaluation of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for 2020-2023 ([HSP/HA.2/9](#)). He highlighted a recovery framework and roadmap to accelerate NUA implementation, and efforts to improve basic services and create safer and co-created public spaces. He suggested extending the Strategic Plan by two years to consolidate work and increase impact, noting UN-Habitat is preparing the 2026-2029 Plan. Delegates forwarded this to the COW for further discussion.

In the COW on Tuesday, the Secretariat outlined implementation of the current Strategic Plan, noting progress made in the Plan's four domains of change, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and financial constraints. He suggested this proved the Strategic Plan is a robust framework for recovery and a roadmap to accelerate NUA implementation for achieving the SDGs. He discussed the Executive Board's recommendation to extend the plan until 2025 so a new plan can be developed for the period 2026-2029. The Secretariat outlined three new policy areas—adequate housing, climate action, and urban crises recovery—to be added in the new plan, as well as two new drivers: SDG localization and financing. He said the intention is to ensure the new plan has a stronger evidence base, incorporates lessons learned, and provides for more monitoring and reporting on project delivery and impact.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO expressed support for extending the current Strategic Plan until 2025 but stressed this must be done through a formal Assembly decision and should not be considered as setting a precedent for future UN-Habitat strategic plans.

Suggesting much has been achieved in implementing the Strategic Plan, KENYA noted a lack of resources hampers full implementation. She expressed support for extending the Strategic Plan and hoped that the midterm review will identify gaps to inform preparations of the next strategic plan.

National Statements

National statements were delivered in plenary on [Monday](#) afternoon, [Tuesday](#), and [Thursday](#) morning.

Executive Board

On Thursday, Chair Albuquerque opened the second session of UN-Habitat's Executive Board for 2023. The Board adopted its agenda ([HSP/EB.2023/8](#)).

Election of officers: Chair Albuquerque noted the suggestion to extend the term of Bureau officers by two years until 2025 to align with UN-Habitat's other governing bodies. EGYPT highlighted the need for equitable geographic representation and inquired about election procedures. The US clarified that normally an election would be required, but this exceptional circumstance was clarified by the prior Board session. Delegates agreed to extend the mandate of the current Board officers.

Date of the next session: Chair Albuquerque proposed that the Board officers decide an appropriate date and duration for its third meeting of 2023 as soon as possible, considering relevant international meetings and national holidays, and set an appropriate agenda, in view of UNHA2 outcomes, to which the Board agreed.

Due diligence assessment of the Sustainable Human Settlements Foundation: Chair Albuquerque reminded the Board of its prior recommendation to conduct a due diligence assessment of the Sustainable Human Settlements Foundation (SHSF), the proposed vehicle to create an endowment with UN-Habitat as the sole beneficiary to which private donors and sovereign wealth funds could contribute to support the UN-Habitat agenda. The Secretariat presented the assessment ([HSP/EB.2023/CRP1/Rev.1](#)) noting among other items: the scope and definitions; integrity, transparency and accountability; and shared values and complementarity. He mentioned the analysis reviewed, *inter alia*, the Foundation's human rights record, and suggested proceeding on a one-year basis, with the Foundation providing its investment portfolio.

Voicing support, PORTUGAL suggested to ensure accountability and transparency, more time was needed to consult on the assessment, pointing out that documentation was shared the previous night. NIGERIA, supported by the US, PORTUGAL, GERMANY, and URUGUAY, suggested discussing this intersessionally to address any remaining concerns.

Taking this into account, Chair Albuquerque suggested taking note of the document and holding further discussions intersessionally to come to agreement at the Board's third meeting.

Closing Plenary

Adoption of the Report: Rapporteur Tong Guichan (China) presented the draft report (HSP/HA.2/L.1) of UNHA2. The plenary adopted the report with the clarification that incomplete sections would be completed by the Rapporteur.

Report of the COW: COW Chair Asare presented the COW's report (HSP/HA.2/CW/L.1), lauding the work of the COW and the Drafting Committee. He noted coverage of discussions on, among others, UN-Habitat activities, progress on NUA implementation, and the Strategic Plan, and explained that the third and fourth meetings of the COW, in which the Ministerial Declaration, resolutions and decisions were considered, were not included in the report, as these were still being drafted and would be appended later by the Rapporteur. Delegates approved the report of the COW.

Closing Remarks: Executive Director Sharif expressed gratitude to the 52 ministers, 37 deputy ministers and all those that accounted for the 3,433 in-person and 2,084 online attendees, who account for 137 country representatives, for their work in advancing the efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. She highlighted the efforts of Member States, the Drafting Committee, and the COW for their collaborative cooperation and congenial work on the draft resolutions and Ministerial Declaration, and underscored it as a

demonstration of effective multilateralism, proving it is not only necessary, but possible, to work together. Reflecting up on efforts and activities of the week, she noted that while more work is ahead, "UN-Habitat is back."

SOUTH AFRICA emphasized the importance of the resolution on accelerating the transformation of informal settlements and slums by 2030, asking participants to reflect on the question, "How many lives have we positively transformed and will transform to come?"

BOTSWANA noted the monumental achievement of UNHA2 and its resolutions and Ministerial Declaration and discussed the role of technology innovation and smart cities going forward.

EGYPT expressed excitement to be the second African city to host the World Urban Forum in 2024, affirming their commitment to serving the expected 69% of the population living in urban areas by 2040.

MOROCCO discussed national initiatives to enhancing communities' capacity to address climate change and acknowledged the multilateral efforts of the Assembly to draft resolutions towards this work.

INDONESIA highlighted the close link between water and urban issues, noting the country would host the 2024 World Water Forum in Bali.

Stating that "2030 is tomorrow, we need to act today," CAMEROON announced it would host the first conference of ministers of Urban Development in Africa in 2024, calling for UN-Habitat's support.

UN-HABITAT YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD declared "our right to the city," highlighting the importance of smart cities and meaningful partnerships for a more inclusive future.

WORLD BLIND UNION posed the question: "What future are we building and is it a future for everyone?" and urged for resources to be allocated to make the UN system more accessible.

Assembly Vice-President Martin Adjei-Mensah Korsah (Ghana), acting as Assembly President, thanked delegates for their cooperation and declared the meeting adjourned at 5:47 pm.

Final Outcomes

The draft Ministerial Declaration, resolutions and procedural decisions drafted by the CPR before UNHA2 were assigned to the Drafting Committee on Monday. The Drafting Committee negotiated revisions to the draft texts Tuesday through Thursday. Once revised, the texts were referred to the COW, which reviewed them on Thursday and Friday before forwarding them to the plenary for approval. Plenary approved the decisions on [Thursday](#), and the Ministerial Declaration and resolutions on Friday.

International Guidelines on People-centered Smart Cities:

In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.4), the Assembly requests the Executive Director to support Member States and stakeholders in promoting a people-centered smart cities approach, consistent with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to ensure innovation and digital technologies help cities achieve the SDGs and the NUA, including to:

- ensure equitable involvement of all people and that technologies help reduce spatial, economic, social and digital inequalities for inclusive cities;
- ensure digital infrastructure helps reduce cities' environmental impacts, building, amongst others, digital literacy and supporting training of technical staff, and data governance and digital participation;
- facilitate multi-level digital governance and ethical considerations for technologies, such as artificial intelligence;

- create economic opportunities through innovation; centering smart city activities on people's needs through transparency and participation; and
- safeguard public trust through cybersecurity.

The resolution also requests the Executive Director to:

- initiate guidelines on people-centered smart cities as a non-binding framework for developing smart city regulations, plans, and strategies to ensure digital urban infrastructure and data contribute to making cities sustainable, inclusive and prosperous and respectful of human rights, presenting these at the resumed UNHA2; and
- ensure an inclusive consultation with all relevant stakeholders, taking into account traditional knowledge, to inform the drafting process with best practices, guidelines, and lessons learned.

The resolution encourages the Executive Director to leverage technological platforms to support the guidelines, while encouraging Member States and relevant stakeholders to support the process for developing the guidelines. The resolution also invites financial institutions and related agencies to support Member States to apply people-centered smart cities approaches.

Lastly, the resolution requests the Executive Director to report to the Executive Board on progress in implementing the resolution.

Accelerating Transformation of Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.5), the Assembly agrees to:

- undertake the transformation of slums and informal settlements by 2030 as part of a long-term, sustainable plan for transforming neighborhoods and cities into integrated urban settlements that accommodate, support, and enable a decent standard of living for all who inhabit them;
- support 10 key actions towards scaling slum transformation, including: promote multi-level participatory governance; conduct spatial planning; collect data; design and review enabling, user-friendly and simplified legal, regulatory, planning, investment and institutional frameworks; diversify finance; implement adequate housing; recognize the social function of public and private land; strengthen community resilience and empowerment; advance skills and education; promote collaboration for implementation; and
- encourage Member States to accelerate transformative action in informal settlements and take measures in anticipation of the growth of slums, in line with the key actions.

The resolution further requests the Executive Director to:

- place the transformation of informal settlements at the center of UN-Habitat strategic planning and programmes;
- mobilize resources to ensure technical support capacities for the transformation of slums and informal settlements; and
- consult with Member States and stakeholders on joint actions for accelerated scaling of the transformation of slums and informal settlements, in line with the 10 key actions.

World Clean Up Day: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.6), the Assembly, *inter alia*:

- recommends that the UNGA proclaim 20 September as World Cleanup Day, to be observed annually from 2024 onwards;
- invites all parties to observe World Cleanup Day, in an appropriate manner, through activities aimed at raising awareness and its contribution to achieving sustainable development;
- invites UN-Habitat, mindful of criteria set out in the annex to UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) [resolution 1980/67](#), to facilitate the observance of World Cleanup Day;
- stresses that the costs of activities arising from implementation of the resolution should be met from voluntary contributions; and

- requests the Executive Director to bring the present resolution to the attention of all relevant stakeholders for appropriate observance.

Biodiverse and Resilient Cities: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.7), the Assembly requests the Executive Director, subject to funding, to, *inter alia*:

- encourage a shift in urbanization, accounting for biodiversity and ecosystem services, including by: mainstreaming biodiversity into urban and territorial planning; aligning policies across governing levels, sensitive to socio-economic and ecological contexts; and promoting income-generating opportunities for sustainable use and management of biodiversity for people in vulnerable situations;
- establish an open-ended international expert advisory group to produce a toolkit on urban development for more biodiverse and resilient cities to, among others: compile best practices; raise awareness of criteria, standards and challenges; identify vulnerable people's needs; and compile innovative methodologies;
- assist in technical assistance to strengthen biodiversity management in urban planning;
- assist Member States and UN agencies to identify options for supporting investment and in developing programmes to promote action;
- articulate the links between biodiverse cities and the NUA, reporting to the Executive Board;
- submit to UN-Habitat's Executive Board in 2024 a toolkit on more biodiverse and resilient cities;
- convene a group of financing partners to implement policies favoring more biodiverse and resilient cities through capacity building and aligned solutions and explore fundraising options; and
- report to UNHA3 on the status of the implementation of the present resolution.

The resolution also encourages Member States to contribute to its implementation through increased contributions to UN-Habitat's non-earmarked funds or through soft-earmarked or earmarked funding.

Enhancing the Interlinkage Between Urbanization and Climate Change Resilience: This was the final resolution to be concluded in the Drafting Committee on Thursday evening, after the Committee discussed at length whether and how to mention its connection to the Paris Agreement. In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.8), the Assembly agrees to request the Executive Director, subject to available resources and in line with UN-Habitat's mandate, to, *inter alia*:

- enhance linkages between urbanization and climate change in UN-Habitat's work to contribute to the UNFCCC's objectives and the Paris Agreement, in coordination with Member States;
- engage with Member States and relevant stakeholders to continue organizing meetings, following the Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change at UNFCCC COP 27;
- inform the Executive Board to develop options and recommendations to operationalize the Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe) initiative as a meaningful institutional arrangement for the Executive Board, while commending SURGe's launch at COP 27;
- support initiatives aimed at enhancing communities' capacity to adapt to adverse impacts of climate change and loss and damage;
- scale up the Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor programme (RISE-UP);

- continue mobilizing resources and disseminating information on innovations and good practices on climate action; and
- provide updates to the Board from the first session of 2024, on the implementation of the resolution, including challenges encountered, and propose further measures as needed.

The resolution also encourages Member States to expand cooperation between different levels of government to include local-level contributions in National Determined Contributions (NDC) updates under the Paris Agreement on climate change and their implementation.

Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.9), the Assembly encourages SDG localization to accelerate action to fulfil the 2030 Agenda, by advancing local implementation, monitoring and reporting on progress, and strengthening the inclusion and participation of local communities in the implementation, planning and reporting processes.

To promote the localization of the 2030 Agenda, the resolution requests the Executive Director to:

- advance efforts in developing normative guidance and practical tools on all dimensions of SDG localization;
- build capacity of stakeholders to report on progress through voluntary local and subnational reviews, and to contribute to national reporting on progress towards the NUA;
- develop capacity to improve national reporting on the urban dimension of the SDGs;
- strengthen engagement with and support to the work of local and regional authorities through strategic partnerships;
- support national governments to strengthen local multi-level governance to advance the SDGs through stronger policy coherence, cross-sectoral alignment, and multi-stakeholder engagement and participation;
- continue efforts to mainstream SDG localization across the UN system;
- encourage the use of the global urban monitoring framework to improve reporting on the NUA and localizing the 2030 Agenda;
- enhance initiatives and build capacity to improve spatial and socio-economic data on deprived and vulnerable urban and peri-urban areas and scale up the analysis and production of accurate maps; and
- present to the Executive Board proposals for the implementation of elements in the present resolution with implications for UN-Habitat's core budget.

The resolution further:

- invites Member States and financial partners to support SDG localization by increasing the amounts of concessional financing and improving access to available financing available for local and regional stakeholders to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- encourages Member States to mobilize resources through voluntary contributions to strengthen UN-Habitat's work on SDG localization;
- encourages Member States to support the Local2030 coalition as the platform to converge networks of local and regional governments and stakeholders; and
- invites Member States to collaborate with the Group of 20 Platform on SDG Localization and Intermediary Cities and to support similar international initiatives.

Adequate Housing for All: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.10), the Assembly expresses concern that SDG indicator 11.1.1 (reduce the proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing) is one of nine indicators

suggesting progress has regressed globally. The Assembly decides to, among others:

- establish an open-ended intergovernmental expert working group to develop content on policies for accelerating progress towards the universal achievement of safe, sustainable, adequate and affordable housing;
- review at UNHA3 the open-ended intergovernmental expert working group's recommendations, and consider its report as guidelines for accelerating progress towards the universal achievement of safe, sustainable, adequate and affordable housing; and
- invite relevant UN bodies and financial institutions to contribute to the activities of the open-ended intergovernmental expert working group.

The resolution further calls on Member States, in accordance with national legislation, and, where relevant, local and regional authorities, to:

- prioritize access to adequate housing, including addressing homelessness and slum transformation, as central for inclusive, resilient post-pandemic recovery, and achieving the 2030 Agenda and the NUA;
- expand access to safe, sustainable, adequate and affordable housing through inclusive and integrated strategies, with respect to human rights, targeting all households and forms of tenure, with efforts aimed at providing housing solutions for lower-income households and households facing risk of displacement; and
- collect and release disaggregated and local data on adequate housing to inform action and monitor the impact of measures.

The Assembly agrees to continue developing inclusive and cross-sectoral strategies that respect and progressively realize the right to adequate housing, as derived from the right to an adequate standard of living for all, and to ensure that these strategies:

- outline clear responsibilities at all government levels;
- contain measurable goals, targets and timelines; and
- include mechanisms for monitoring and review, with emphasis on members of different income groups of society, taking into consideration the socio-economic and cultural integration of marginalized communities, homeless persons, and those in vulnerable situations, and preventing segregation.

The resolution also requests the Executive Director to assess available platforms and resources that provide data and tools to national and local authorities and key stakeholders. It invites financial institutions to support financing provided by national, regional and local authorities and governments for safe, sustainable, adequate and affordable housing and promote construction of climate-neutral housing.

Urban Planning and Sustainable Infrastructure: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.11), the Assembly requests the Executive Director and Executive Board to develop a global technical digital platform for urbanization and infrastructure development, serving as a tool for holistic urban planning and sustainable infrastructure. It invites Member States, partners and stakeholders to consider voluntary contributions to the global digital platform to advance its objectives, while calling on all stakeholders to promote and share best practices for sustainable urban planning and infrastructure development through the global technical digital platform.

The resolution encourages Member States to:

- identify their urbanization needs through evidence-based analysis and profiling of territories and urban areas; and
- utilize the tools and technical supports available for integrated and inclusive urban planning and sustainable infrastructure.

The resolution further requests the Executive Director to:

- allow for information and guidance from multilateral and bilateral financing institutions and other financing actors on the provision of sustainable financing to achieve the SDGs; and
- provide regular updates on operationalization and uptake of the global platform to the Executive Board.

Creation of a Human Settlements Resilience Framework for Early Warning, Foresight, Risk Reduction, Crisis Response and Post-crisis Recovery and Reconstruction: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.12), the Assembly requests the Executive Director to develop an operational framework that incorporates best practices, improves cooperation, and addresses gaps to strengthen resilience in human settlements. The framework will serve to, *inter alia*:

- organize and coordinate a collaborative global coalition committed to anticipating and tracking disasters and other urban crisis risks;
- facilitate access to science and data on crises;
- support capacity building of stakeholders for resilience building and risk reduction;
- improve human settlements risk assessment capacity and resilience planning globally and reduce vulnerability; and
- support rapid recovery from urban crises and support developing urban recovery frameworks that complement nationally led recovery frameworks.

The resolution urges Member States and stakeholders to cooperate with UN-Habitat on its effective implementation and requests the Executive Director to provide updates on its implementation, including challenges, and to propose further measures as needed.

Equitable Financing and Effective Monitoring of the Implementation of Resolutions Adopted by the UNHA: In the final resolution (HSP/HA.2/L.13), the Assembly, *inter alia*:

- requests the Executive Director to implement, in consultation with the Executive Board, a system, readily accessible to Member States, for tracking the implementation of resolutions adopted by UNHA, to ensure accountability and transparency;
- requests the Executive Director to report regularly on the status of the implementation of UNHA resolutions to appropriate bodies for review and action as needed;
- establishes an urban action funding window within the UN-Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation to attract and manage funds from donors to fund implementation of resolutions adopted by UNHA that lack financing; such funds may be raised from, among others, non-earmarked contributions designated for this purpose, as well as unspent balances of earmarked project contributions, with the permission of the donor;
- requests the Executive Director, in consultation with the Executive Board, to develop terms of reference for the urban action funding window, noting the need to implement UNHA resolutions in a balanced manner;
- encourages Member States with unspent earmarked contribution balances to consider redirecting those balances for the implementation of resolutions adopted by UNHA;
- encourages more Member States to contribute regularly to the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation; and
- requests the Executive Director to report to the Executive Board on the progress made in implementing this resolution.

Decisions: On Thursday, the plenary adopted a set of five decisions forwarded by the COW (HSP/HA.2/L.3).

Extension of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan of UN-Habitat until the Year 2025: In decision 2/1, the Assembly extends the Strategic Plan for the period 2020-2023, until 2025, to align UN-Habitat's

planning cycle with the UN quadrennial comprehensive policy review process. The decision requests the Executive Board to start preparations for the UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan for the period 2026-2029.

Date of the Resumed Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly: In decision 2/2, the Assembly agrees to resume its second regular session from 29-30 May 2025 to achieve alignment of UN-Habitat planning cycle with the UN's quadrennial comprehensive policy review process. The Assembly also sets the provisional agenda of the session, with the only substantive item being the Strategic Plan of UN-Habitat for the period 2026-2029.

Term of Office of the Members of the Executive Board and the Assembly Bureau: In decision 2/3, the Assembly confirms that the current members of the Executive Board and the Assembly Bureau have their terms extended until the closure of the resumed UNHA2.

Stakeholder Engagement Policy of UN-Habitat: In decision 2/4, the Assembly entrusts the Executive Board, "on an exceptional basis," to continue work on the stakeholder engagement policy mandated by UNHA1 for possible approval at the resumed UNHA2 in 2025.

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the Review of Management and Administration in UN-Habitat: In decision 2/5, the Assembly takes note of the Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the review of management and administration in UN-Habitat ([JIU/REP/2022/1](#)), and notes that the current governance structure of UN-Habitat was established only in 2019, "and that adequate time is required for the structure to function before any effective assessment is conducted." It also takes note of the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network assessment of UN-Habitat planned for 2024.

Ministerial Declaration: The Ministerial Declaration of the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly (HSP/HA.2/L.2) is titled "A Sustainable Urban Future through Inclusive and Effective Multilateralism: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Times of Global Crisis." Through the Declaration, the Ministers responsible for cities and human settlements, among other things:

- reaffirm their commitment to the NUA and its implementation plan and pledge that no one will be left behind;
- welcome the 2022 quadrennial report of the UN Secretary-General on progress in NUA implementation;
- welcome the Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan adopted at UNFCCC COP 27 recognizing the role of cities in addressing and responding to climate change, and highlight the urgent need for cooperative action in this regard, within the mandate of UN-Habitat;
- welcome the recommendation in [UNGA resolution 77/262](#) encouraging UN-Habitat to continue to cooperate closely with the resident coordinator system and to explore opportunities for increased cooperation with other entities, and welcome cooperation with other entities, including at the regional and subregional levels;
- commit to advancing multilateral engagement and international cooperation to address urban crises, SDG localization, the need for adequate housing, and the importance of integrated urban development through inclusive urban and territorial planning, multi-level governance, urban climate change adaptation and mitigation, response to natural disasters, and sustainable finance approaches;
- agree that inclusive and effective action requires a multi-level, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach with strong attention to data systems and knowledge for evidence-based policies and results monitoring, innovation, advocacy and

communication, partnerships, capacity building and digital transformation for accelerated progress;

- commit to further strengthening mobilization and advocacy efforts in support of Urban October, which starts on World Habitat Day, held on the first Monday of October, and ends on World Cities Day, held 31 October;
- reaffirm the important role of UN-Habitat as the UN focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements;
- commit to strengthening UN-Habitat so that it can deliver effectively on its mandate by providing financial resources, and by exploring innovative resource mobilization options, as well as by overseeing and providing strategic guidance for UN-Habitat's normative and operational activities; and
- welcome a commemoration in Nairobi of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UN-Habitat before UNHA3.

The Ministers also encourage Member States and relevant stakeholders, including through inclusive and effective multilateralism and international cooperation, as appropriate, to:

- explore mechanisms and platforms for advancing sustainable solutions to progressively achieving the full realization of the right to adequate housing;
- explore just urban pathways for environmental action and sustainable consumption and production and ways in which integrated and participatory urban climate action, measures to curb waste and pollution, and biodiversity action can be strengthened through relevant global, regional, and local initiatives that enhance the interlinkages between urbanization and climate change;
- promote inclusive urban recovery frameworks that empower cities to respond to natural and human-made urban crises and support national recovery efforts;
- advance effective multi-level governance and promote integrated local and regional planning and investment;
- strengthen SDG localization and empower local and regional authorities and governments as central actors to accelerate action towards the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda; and
- promote people-centered smart city approaches by enhancing UN-Habitat's existing work on smart cities.

The Declaration also calls upon the Executive Director to follow up on progress in implementing actions called for in the Declaration and fall within the mandate of UN-Habitat.

A Brief Analysis of the Second UN-Habitat Assembly

Against a backdrop of global crises that are having particularly severe effects on cities, the Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly (UNHA2) convened around the theme of a sustainable urban future through inclusive and effective multilateralism. This theme was operationalized into five sub-themes addressed by the Assembly: universal access to affordable housing; urban climate action; urban crises recovery; localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and prosperity and local finance.

The Assembly was tasked with identifying key issues and areas of focus for UN-Habitat's work, reviewing major trends related to human settlements and urbanization, examining global norms and standards regarding both, adopting resolutions and other instruments to provide strategic vision and political guidance to UN-Habitat, and recommending strategies for coherent implementation of the urban and human settlement dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

This brief analysis explores how the Assembly's themes were elevated over a week of negotiations, high-level dialogues, and

informal exchanges, and if the events and actions that unfolded fulfilled the responsibilities of the UNHA. In doing so, it examines how this relatively young governance body is positioning urban issues in a crowded multilateral space and how UN-Habitat is developing its vision for influencing future directions of the sustainable development agenda post-2030.

The Challenges We Face

By 2030, 3 billion people—40% of the world's population—will be living in inadequate housing.

Up to 60% of those displaced by conflicts and disasters seek shelter and refuge in cities. – UN-Habitat

Cities and urban areas are already home to more than 55% of the world's population. By 2050, the world's urban population is expected to nearly double, making urbanization one of the twenty-first century's most transformative trends. Populations, economic activities, social and cultural interactions, as well as environmental and humanitarian impacts, are increasingly concentrated in cities, and these pose massive sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources, among others.

To address these challenges, the NUA, a collection of principles, policies, and standards, was adopted in 2016 and has served as UN-Habitat's North Star within a larger landscape of cross-cutting and overlapping agendas and frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda. However, the NUA has been critiqued as aspirational, without clear strategies and measurable pathways and milestones to guide its implementation. This perhaps explains why, seven years after its adoption, only 40 countries have voluntarily submitted NUA implementation reports.

UN-Habitat has sought to translate the NUA into more concrete actions, but it faces several challenges, including lack of funding and organizational capacity. Furthermore, in recent years it has had to be more reactive than proactive as challenges multiply due to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Complicating matters is the nature of the urban agenda itself: the issues are local, yet the people "sitting at the table" in the Assembly represent national governments.

The Assembly's Response

A sustainable urban future is within our reach. We need bold action and collective effort to create thriving cities. – Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

UNHA2 acknowledged adequate housing as one of the most pressing problems of the 21st century, calling for accelerated action in the remaining seven years of the 2030 Agenda "to build the foundation for a transformation meeting the needs of today's estimated one billion slum and informal settlement dwellers." While UN-Habitat and partners launched a global action plan towards this end in 2022, discussions also acknowledged that preparations for urban transformation must be done "on a war footing," as stressed by economist Mariana Mazzucato.

With cities responsible for more than 70% of global carbon emissions, climate change was another big issue on the agenda. The readiness of cities to take responsibility for tackling the climate crisis has been demonstrated in recent years by such initiatives as the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions' Cities Race to Zero Campaign. UN-Habitat is carving a clear niche in these discussions, notably with its nomination to convene the UN Secretary-General's Task Force on the Future of Cities, which aims to strengthen multilateral and multi-level action in response to global crises.

Among other multilateral initiatives led by UN-Habitat, the UNHA2 outcome documents recognize the convening of the first Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change at the 27th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 27) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

So, did this Assembly session succeed in demonstrating a stronger case for UN-Habitat's role in a crowded multilateral space, increasingly filled with multiple UN agencies, city networks, and civil society actors eager to represent the voice of cities? To a large extent, Member States acknowledged proposals contained in the Executive Director's report, for example, the creation of a new organizational structure to deliver "integrated urban solutions" and enable the agency to advance the New Urban Agenda. They also welcomed declared actions and other commitments made by diverse actors at recent sessions of the World Urban Forum, as well as localization efforts driven by issue-based and multi-level networks and coalitions, such as [Local2030](#), or the [Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation](#) (SURGe) initiative, launched at UNFCCC COP 27.

Regarding funding for such initiatives, the UNHA2 Ministerial Declaration calls for an "urban action funding window" to mobilize and streamline funding for implementation of the 10 resolutions adopted at the Assembly. As stated in plenary interventions and bilaterals, it's not the number of resolutions, but rather how realistically they can be implemented—or financed. One of the proposals put forward in the Ministerial Declaration is to reallocate unspent balances of earmarked project contributions "with the permission of the donor." But whether such funding will actually materialize is another matter. This, however, may be partially addressed once UN-Habitat succeeds in creating the Sustainable Human Settlements Foundation (SHSF), the proposed vehicle to create an endowment, with UN-Habitat as the sole beneficiary, to which private donors and sovereign wealth funds could support the UN-Habitat agenda.

Missed Opportunity?

Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been. – UN Secretary-General António Guterres

With SDG 11 among the global goals to be discussed in depth at this year's High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, UNHA2 offered an opportune moment to reflect on how to leverage UN-Habitat's position and progress on sustainable urbanization. Despite UN-Habitat's potential, several observers questioned the limited attention to reviewing global progress towards SDG 11, its targets and indicators at UNHA2, not to mention a lack of messaging for the SDG Summit in September 2023 and the 2024 Summit of the Future.

As noted by one diplomat, the substantive agenda of UNHA2 was akin to an academic conference or series of side events, rather than a high-level decision-making forum. Even though UNHA2 managed to gather approximately 90 ministers and vice ministers, as well as numerous municipal leaders, it may have missed an important political opportunity. UNHA2, as some suggested, should have sent a robust political message from local political leaders—and those ministers making crucial day-to-day decisions on urbanization policy—to the greater multilateral system.

Some have pointed to the need for bolder, higher-profile leadership from UN-Habitat to place cities more prominently on the global stage, while others lauded how far it has come under its new governing structure and leadership. As one civil society delegate

noted, while adoption of the 2016 NUA at Habitat III was an important milestone that underscores the diversity and complexity of urban challenges, it has failed to capture the public imagination, now seven years since its adoption. This, according to another delegate, illustrates the fundamental "marketing" challenge that UN-Habitat faces in trying to distil the urgency of the NUA into clear and accessible language to inspire action on sustainable urbanization.

But, according to insiders, such comparisons may be unfair as UN-Habitat faces more than just a communication challenge. Urbanization is a complex convergence of social life, economic opportunity, and the environment playing out in global data trends and deeply local contexts and individual stories. This is difficult to reduce to a simple idea to galvanize change, one observer noted. This is especially challenging for an understaffed and under-resourced Secretariat with a massive mandate.

For example, does UN-Habitat have the capacity to help cities transition from fossil-fuel dominated transport systems and streets clogged with private vehicles, to more sustainable, inclusive and integrated urban transport systems? Can UN-Habitat help cities transform slums and informal settlements into more formalized settlements, tackling land tenure and supporting the provision of basic services? These aspects have long been a part of UN-Habitat's core work programme, albeit against a backdrop of unprecedented slum growth across the world. Despite the gravity of these challenges, as one observer noted, these efforts and guidance are better addressed "with, not for" the communities they serve, underscoring perhaps a role for UN-Habitat as a convener of actions to improve cities, rather than as an implementation agency.

The Road Ahead

The world is not black and white, we can create a brighter urban future for all. – UN-Habitat

The Executive Director's background paper on the UNHA2 special theme concludes that while the multilateral system has advanced in terms of agenda-setting to support sustainable urbanization, the gaps in progress on SDG 11 are indicative: "stronger and more innovative participatory delivery mechanisms are needed to transform policies into action and allocate funding for implementation to the regional and local levels."

The launch of the SURGe initiative at COP 27 is one example of a concrete response to the call for effective multi-level governance by building more strategically on cities as allies to help deliver the targets of the Paris Agreement and the SDGs. This is in line with UN-Habitat's stated intention to "signal a paradigm shift" through its current Strategic Plan, which includes implementation of [five flagship programmes](#) that aim to foster people-centered, resilient and inclusive cities and communities.

The enduring question is whether UNHA2's resolutions, decisions, and Ministerial Declaration have done enough to move beyond rhetoric and towards effective and sustained action across multiple levels for a more concrete implementation of the NUA and the urban dimensions of the SDGs. Perhaps the answer to this question will begin to emerge at the upcoming HLPF and subsequent global summits—particularly where urban actors will have to compete with a cacophony of other voices to be heard.

Upcoming Meetings

Urban Future 2023: Urban Future brings together city leaders, experts, and stakeholders to discuss the future of cities. The 2023 conference will feature eight tracks: cities cutting emissions; fixing mobility in regions; innovating for transformation; decarbonizing

the built environment; reinventing city centers and districts; citizen engagement and collaboration; skills for city changers; and leadership. **dates:** 21-23 June 2023 **location:** Stuttgart, Germany **www:** urban-future.org/event/stuttgart-23

African Smart Cities Summit: The Summit will explore how smart cities can deliver a quality life and enable economic growth through the internet of things, technology, and creative thinking. The Summit has five themes: sustainability and green solutions; digital transformation; smart mobility; connected and inclusive cities; and economy and governance. **dates:** 27-29 June 2023 **location:** Johannesburg, South Africa **www:** thebig5constructsouthernafrica.com/african-smart-cities-summit

HLPF 2023: The 2023 meeting of the HLPF, under the auspices of ECOSOC, will convene under the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.” The 2023 meeting will hold in-depth reviews of five SDGs: 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and 17 (partnerships for the Goals). It will also support the midterm review of the implementation of the SDGs and preparations for the 2023 SDG Summit. **dates:** 10-19 July 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org/2023

SDG Summit: The Summit is the quadrennial meeting of the HLPF under the auspices of the UNGA. The 2023 Summit will be the second since the adoption of the SDGs and will take place at the midpoint of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. **dates:** 18-19 September 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org/sdg-summit

UrbanShift Asia Forum: Funded by the Global Environment Facility and led by UNEP, UrbanShift is working to transform cities for people and planet through sustainable, integrated, zero-carbon urban development. The Asia Forum senior political and technical representatives from UrbanShift cities will meet with international organizations, financial institutions, businesses, and NGOs to exchange knowledge on regional urban challenges and replicable solutions. Participants will also explore innovative ways of financing their climate projects and present ideas to a curated audience of investors. **dates:** 25-28 September 2023 **location:** New Delhi, India **www:** shiftcities.org/event/asia-forum-2023

Urban Resilience Week: The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will bring together representatives of national and subnational governments, experts, civil society representatives from the UNECE region and beyond to discuss strategies and solutions for building more resilient and sustainable cities. The 3rd Forum of Mayors will be held 2-3 October, and the 84th session of the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management will be held 4-6 October. **dates:** 2-6 October 2023 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** unece.org/housing/events/urban-resilience-week

Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-8): APUF-8 provides a platform to discuss and analyze the status of implementation of, as well as challenges and opportunities associated with, the NUA, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the 2030 Agenda in the region. The Forum will include a high-level ministerial session and launch a flagship report to be jointly published by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), UN-Habitat, and other partners assessing the status of urbanization across the region. **dates:** 23-25 October 2023 **location:** Suwon, Republic of Korea **www:** apuf8.org

Smart City Expo World Congress 2023: Smart City Expo World Congress 2023 will bring together city leaders and experts to discuss the latest trends and best practices in smart city development and the role of technology in creating smarter, more livable and inclusive cities. The event will focus on eight tracks: enabling technologies; energy and environment; mobility; governance; living and inclusion; economy; infrastructure and building; and safety and security. **dates:** 7-9 November 2023 **location:** Barcelona, Spain **www:** smartcityexpo.com

2023 Climate Change Conference: The 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28), the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 18), and the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 5) will convene. **dates:** 30 November – 12 December 2023 **location:** Dubai, United Arab Emirates **www:** unfccc.int/cop28

2024 Sustainable Built Environment Conference (SBE24): SBE24 will address climate change resiliency, adaptation, and mitigation through the lens of the built environment, which includes cities, urban and peri-urban areas. SBE24 will feature six tracks: future-ready and resilient communities; retreat and adaptation; flows and decarbonization; decarbonization pathways; process and tools; and novel tectonics. **dates:** 30 April – 3 May 2024 **location:** Montreal, Canada **www:** wsbe23.ca

10th European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns (ESCT): ESCT brings together participants from local and regional governments, European and international institutions, multilateral organizations, the research community, businesses, and civil society every three to four years, marking milestones for progress and achievements in local sustainability in Europe. **dates:** 1-3 October 2024 **location:** Aalborg, Denmark **www:** sustainablecities.eu/conferences/about-the-series

Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12): WUF12, convened by UN-Habitat, will be an opportunity to hold global discussions around sustainable urbanization through sharing of knowledge and best practices as well as to share Egypt’s urban experience, including establishing new cities and the development of informal areas. **dates:** 4-8 November 2024 **location:** Cairo, Egypt **www:** wuf.unhabitat.org/wuf12

Resumed 2nd Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly: The Second UN-Habitat Assembly will resume to consider the Strategic Plan for UN-Habitat for 2026-2029. **dates:** 29-30 May 2025 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** unhabitat.org/habitatassembly

For additional upcoming events, see: sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

COP	Conference of the Parties
COW	Committee of the Whole
CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
NUA	New Urban Agenda
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNHA	UN-Habitat Assembly
UN-Habitat	UN Human Settlements Programme
UNON	UN Office at Nairobi
WUF	World Urban Forum