



UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Global Observance of World Habitat Day speech
Monday 5 October 2020

Excellencies

Honourable Ministers

Honourable Mayors

Distinguished guests

Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning/afternoon/evening to all of you!

It is wonderful to see so many celebrations around the world - I have been told that 50 cities are hosting events to commemorate the World Habitat Day this year. I am particularly thankful to the Government of Indonesia and the city of Surabaya for hosting the Global Observance of World Habitat Day 2020. Let me also thank the city of Subang Jaya here in Malaysia for providing me with this wonderful hall and the support services to enable us, to be connected to multiple cities at the same time!

What a difference a year makes. Twelve months ago, we celebrated World Habitat Day in Mexico City in person, with Madame Martha Delgado, our UN-Habitat Assembly President. COVID-19 has turned things upside down. The latest figures show some 34 million people have been infected with over a million global deaths. I have been informed by my team that every precaution, has been taken to ensure that, this hybrid live and virtual event takes place safely. Our health is of paramount importance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Every year, World Habitat Day presents to all of us, an opportunity to reflect on the state of the world's cities, towns and human settlements. We take stock of our efforts to ensure no one and no place is left behind. We also come together to figure out a way to progress better together.

2020 presents us with a major challenge. On all fronts, our collective aspiration to meet the 2030 SDG targets have been pushed back by COVID-19. We estimate millions to fall into poverty, as lockdowns impact on our socio-economic progress. The pandemic also gives rise to an economic depression, not seen before since World War II.



At UN-Habitat, as the penholder of the Secretary-General’s Policy Brief on COVID-19 in an Urban World, we sprung into action very early. Since 15 March, we have been collaborating with more than 1,000 cities and with all our 193 member states, providing them guidance, on how to cope with the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. With 95% of all confirmed cases of COVID-19 happening in cities and urban areas, it is clear that we need collective and multilateral efforts if human settlements are to recover from this global crisis.

It is at critical moments like now, that we look deep into ourselves and return to the basics. For us at UN-Habitat, the pandemic highlighted our core mandate, which is adequate shelter for all. Hence, this year’s World Habitat Day theme is ‘**Housing for All: A Better Urban Future.**’

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have all been told that the best advice to keep safe from COVID-19 is to keep social distance, wash our hands and to stay at home. As those on the frontline, you know that these simple measures are impossible for many. There are an estimated 1.8 billion people living in slums and informal settlements. They have inadequate housing and have no access to basic urban services. Even in developed countries, there are still millions who are homeless.

Part of our immediate action working with 64 countries around the world, is the UN-Habitat’s COVID-19 Response Plan, which is still on-going. We have seen evictions halted, shelter found for the homeless, handwashing stations set up in slums, and highways turned into pedestrian areas.

We now need to ensure that the fast reaction, particularly from national and local governments, is maintained, and we have policies and legislation to ensure adequate housing for all. Inclusive, affordable and adequate housing is the central to transforming our cities and communities and making them resilient, and to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 and all the SDGs.

It is essential that we do not return to the normal before COVID-19. We need to build back better and greener. The Secretary-General emphasized that the recovery is an opportunity to rethink urban living, to address the climate crisis, and adapt to the reality of this and future pandemics.



We now have 10 years left to achieve the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Right now, the achievement of the SDGs may seem far away. Yet, I believe we can reach these Goals eventually, and the key is our cities and communities.

We have come a long way, since the creation of the United Nations 75 years ago. There has been important progress in peace building and security, poverty reduction, clean water and improved sanitation, gender equality, and other critical areas of development. Let us also highlight progress made in the area of housing and shelter, which is our most fundamental right.

UN-Habitat is working to ensure a better urban future for all around the world. Please look out for our Catalogue of Services, which is available on our website. It outlines a whole range of services we can provide to help cities and communities meet the great challenges of our time. To all the mayors attending this global observance in 50 events happening worldwide, please also consider committing to carrying out the Voluntary Local Reviews. We need to localize the SDGs in this Decade of Action, and I call for your support to scale this up, starting from today's Global Observance of World Habitat Day.

Finally, let us join forces to respond to the current crisis, share solutions and create cities of the future for everyone. We need to empower individuals, communities, neighbourhoods and cities, to take small steps together, to build back better and greener for future generations.

Thank you / Xiexie / Shukraan / Merci / Spasiba / Gracias!