

**STATEMENT BY MR. JAMES W. MACHARIA, EGH., CABINET SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING, URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS, DURING GLOBAL OBSERVANCE OF WORLD CITIES DAY ON SATURDAY 31st October 2020**

- **Mr. Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General,**
- **H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya and Commander in Chief of the Defense Forces**
- **Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UN-Habitat;**
- **Hon. Wycliffe Oparanya, Chairman of the Council of Governors in the Republic of Kenya**
- **Hon. Lee Kinyanjui, Governor of Nakuru County;**
- **Excellencies;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

Today, Kenya joins the rest of the world in the observance of the World Cities Day. This day has been observed on the 31st of October of every year since 2014, in a bid to promote social inclusion in urbanization, and to provide a forum for discussing emerging issues concerning urbanisation.

I am speaking to you today in very unusual circumstances, as this year we have the first ever virtual observance of the World Cities Day. We are living in unprecedented times, and the mode in which we are holding this event is testament to the disruption that has visited our planet as a result of the ongoing pandemic. But it also demonstrates the resilience of the human spirit and our ability to quickly adapt in the face of adversity.

Covid-19 has served as a strong reminder of the importance of prioritising sustainable urban development. Densely populated urban centres have been the epicentres of the spread of COVID-19 in all parts of the world. Crowded spaces are the lifeblood of cities. However, crowds are now seen as major health risks, and people are more fearful of crowded trains and buses, restaurants, theaters stadiums, supermarkets and offices. Indeed, the fear of contagion has made many weary of crowded cities, and more and more people are moving to less crowded suburbs and rural areas.

The theme for this year's observance, ***Better Cities Better life*** and its sub-theme ***Valuing our Communities and Cities*** could not be more appropriate given the current circumstances. The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the livelihoods of urban dwellers, especially the vulnerable populations living in informal settlements, and has rolled back several years' gains in revitalizing our urban economies. The theme is also consistent with the Kenya's National Urban Development Policy that undertakes to promote secure, well governed, competitive and sustainable urban areas.

The world after COVID-19 will be different — as it is after any disaster. As we learn to live with the pandemic, we should rebuild new kinds of cities, different than what we have had in the past; cities that are configured to withstand shocks like COVID-19.

As we prepare for this reality, the Kenyan Government has stepped up measures to safeguard the lives of urban dwellers and reconstruct our urban areas. We are implementing initiatives aimed at providing employment to vulnerable youth living in informal settlements whose livelihoods have been adversely impacted by the pandemic. We have implemented the National Hygiene Programme (NHP) dubbed "***Kazi Mtaani***" initiative, under which youth are employed to carry out environmental clean-up and waste management activities. This program has been instrumental in improving the economic fortunes of vulnerable youth, promoting hygiene in informal communities, and transforming the lives and living environments of many Kenyans.

The Kenyan Government is also re-configuring urban markets to be compliant with COVID-19 health protocols, and intensifying civic education to promote observance of these protocols. We are also reviewing planning instruments to revive economic activity in urban areas.

In order to actualize inclusivity in urban development, county governments across Kenya are establishing Citizen Fora where citizens can participate in designing, building and maintaining their living environments. Further, we have strengthened urban institutions with the support of development partners. This has resulted in the attainment of key urban development milestones, such as the installation of key urban infrastructure and services in 59 municipalities throughout the country.

The Government is also establishing a National Urban Development Fund with the aim of creating a sustainable system for supporting the implementation of the National Urban Development Policy and promoting sustainable urban development, especially in small and medium-sized towns. This fund will be aimed at entrenching sustainable development principles early enough to prevent the entrenchment of inappropriate structures and practices that will be difficult to reverse.

Even as central and local governments lead efforts to promote sustainable urban development, private citizens and the business community have an important role to play in promoting equality and diversity, and facilitating better access to services. We will continue to pursue beneficial partnerships with the private sector to support interventions aimed at creating opportunities, facilitating connections and interactions, and promoting sustainable use of shared resources.

Only by working together can we effectively confront the numerous challenges that humanity currently faces. As leaders, we bear the daunting responsibility of safeguarding the lives of our citizens, hence the importance of fostering the political goodwill necessary to improve

inclusivity in urbanisation, especially given the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is my hope that this year's World Cities Day will foster fruitful deliberations geared towards improving our urban environments in the midst of the pandemic.

**Thank You!**