



Valuing our communities and cities

**UN-Habitat Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif**  
**World Cities Day, New York**  
**Local Innovations, SDGs and COVID-19**  
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Friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

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

I am pleased to be here with you today, to commemorate the World Cities Day, which is also the conclusion of Urban October. We have had a month-long series of events and campaigns, to highlight the importance of sustainable urbanization. The work, of course, does not end at the end of Urban October - rather, the month kickstarts critical conversations and initiatives, that complement UN-Habitat's ongoing work throughout the remainder of the year. It forges new partnerships and collaborations, in support of our common objectives, and brings awareness to issues that require urgent action.

Urban October this year has been unique to say the least. We are amid a global pandemic, where we have witnessed the indefatigable dedication of local governments, in doing their utmost to protect their residents. As noted by the Secretary-General in his Policy Brief, "COVID-19 in an Urban World," 90% of reported cases occurred in cities. And COVID-19 case numbers are beginning to climb again, in many cities, further compromising areas of progress in development.

This year, the United Nations is also marking its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which prompted over a million people to voice their concerns, and hopes for the future of the organization, with an emphasis on the importance of multilateralism. On the occasion of the 75th Anniversary, UN-Habitat together with UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), and other UN agencies, published the publication titled "Shaping the Trends of our Time." The Report highlights the megatrends of urbanization, inequality, aging populations, frontier technologies, and climate change, noting the importance of policy interventions, that acknowledge and build upon the interlinkages among the megatrends.

As Urban October comes to a close, I'd like to share with you some of the major campaigns that UN-Habitat and partners engaged in to raise awareness for critical issues.

**The Safer Cities Challenge**, which began on the International Day of Peace and concludes tomorrow, focused on 40 days to raise awareness, on safety in cities and crime prevention in urban areas, and the promotion of citizen actions and innovations for cities. It also provided a platform to amplify innovations in support of the urban and safety-related elements of the SDGs. So far, 35 organizations have joined the challenge. As we will hear from speakers today, who will discuss local-level innovations, I hope you will all join the Safer Cities Challenge, as we would like to capture your voice and amplify your work.

We are in week four of the five-week **Housing For All Campaign**, which underscores that “housing is not just a roof but a human right”. 1.8 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing, overcrowding, homelessness and housing precarity. Every year, 2 million people around the world are forcibly evicted, and many more risk the threat of eviction, given the emerging economic crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. UN-Habitat is working with partners, to share solutions to housing challenges, and has also helped to bring awareness to this issue through film – ‘The Human Shelter’, by filmmaker Boris Benjamin Bertram, brings viewers on a walkabout of human living across the globe. I encourage you to watch the full movie which is available on the UN-Habitat website.

Tomorrow, the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, which marks the official World Cities Day, the United Nations will launch **the World Cities Report 2020: *The Value of Sustainable Urbanization***. As noted by the Secretary-General in his forwarding remarks, the report affirms that sustainable urban development is essential to sustainable development and will be a central element of the Decade of Action.

This is why the discussion you will have today, on local-level innovations in support of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, is such an important one. Aissata, Deputy Commissioner for Operations and Strategic Partnerships for the City of New York, will discuss the innovative Voluntary Local Review movement, that has given cities a way to highlight their significant contribution to the SDGs. You will also hear from Luis, Director of the Mansueto Institute at the University of Chicago, who will show the Million Neighborhoods Initiative; from Luna, a 14-year old climate activist, who has taken matters into her own hands to realize a better future for all; from Saada whose organization ‘Rethink Food’, sprang into action at the start of the pandemic, to tackle food and job insecurity; James who will discuss how ‘Teach for Uganda’ adapted its learning to meet the needs of its students in Kampala; Eugene, Global Director of Strategic Partnerships and Head of Latin America and the Caribbean for the Resilient Cities network who will discuss their COVID-19 response strategy, and Steve who has dedicated himself, to the

art of conflict resolution and peace. The speakers today will make the argument, through their practical work, of how critical local action is to the realization of the sustainable development goals.

To this end, we must be vigilant about staying on track to achieve the sustainable development goals. The global pandemic has tested the limits of the world's resiliency, uncovered weaknesses, and shown its strengths. By keeping our commitment to the SDGs, we will build back stronger, greener and more equitably. Agenda 2030 has never been so important, and with only ten years left, we cannot afford to forget that the SDGs are our opportunity to transform our world. The dedication and innovative measures taking place at the local level, will help us to achieve a better world for all.

Thank you.