

UN-Habitat Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif
World Cities Day
Roundtable 1: Towards Africities Achieving The SDGs
Through Resilient Intermediate Cities In Africa
31 October 2020

- Honourable Charles Hinga, Principal Secretary, State Department of Housing & Urban Development, Kenya
- Honourable Celestine Ketcha Courtes, Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Cameroon
- Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, the Secretary General of UCLG-Africa
- Distinguished Participants
- Friends, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

The proposed 9th edition of the Africities event will be held at a time, when the world including Africa is dealing with the severe socio-economic, and health challenges of COVID-19.

As countries and cities in the northern hemisphere enter a second period of lock down, we need to be pragmatic that, COVID-19 will continue to dominate our lives for a longer period.

This does not mean that we must shy away from connecting, from reaching out across the digital divide, and from proposing a meaningful event like Africities.

COVID-19 has evolved from a health emergency, into a human settlements crisis. Kenya is a suitable host, as it is the cradle of humanity. This will be the second time that our host country is hosting Africities, the first being the 4th Edition, held in Nairobi in September 2006.

I am looking forward to the 9th Edition scheduled for 16th-20th November 2021 in Kisumu. The Republic of Kenya continues to demonstrate that, African states have the ability to develop their own sustainable urban development paths, as they their cities remain resilient in the face of severe socio-economic challenges of COVID-19.

Nakuru Municipality, another of Kenya's promising urban areas, has just commenced the process of transitioning to a city, in line with Kenya's Urban Areas and Cities Act.

I am grateful to the Governor and the city of Nakuru, for hosting the global observance of the World Cities Day this year. They are doing this in collaboration with Kisumu City, the host of Africities 2021 and Uasin Gishu County, home of Eldoret Municipality, another emerging Kenyan city.

These cities demonstrate the resilience of human settlements. I thank them for demonstrating Kenya's strong commitment, to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), especially SDG 11 on sustainable Cities and Communities, for adopting the recommendations of the New Urban Agenda (NUA). On behalf of UN-Habitat, I do congratulate Kenya in this regard.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform you that, in order to build back better and greener of cities and urban areas, UN-Habitat is embarking on ground-breaking activities in Nakuru and Kisumu, to trace the COVID-19 virus in wastewater.

In instances of limited testing capacity, this novel approach will support an early warning system that can help detect new hotspots and provide guidance for needed public health action.

This is a demonstration of our normative and operational mandate. Working with water and sanitation operators, medical researchers and technology providers in Kenya and the Netherlands, UN-Habitat will pilot new mobile monitoring technology to detect the virus, supported by web-based data-management applications. With this, we can help city managers and communities to take action, based on up-to-date and reliable data to channel resources to specific communities in need.

In addition, UN-Habitat has been actively engaged, in supporting the recovery process to many secondary cities in Africa. We started with the publication of the Joint report on Cities and COVID-19 in Africa. We are now following up on action by way of working with city managers, to develop urban responses and recovery plans in Cameroun, Guinea, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, where we have partnerships with UN agencies and implementing partners. The crucial support of SIDA is most appreciated and is channeled towards data collection, improvement of informal settlements, access to basic service and capacity development.

These are catalytic investments, to help cities and communities become more resilient. Once these city profiles are completed, it is the hope of UN-Habitat to further engage African cities to carry out Voluntary Local Reviews, as part of monitoring and localization of the SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda.

We have aligned our engagements along the priorities of member states, including the sub-national governments. The Strategy of UN-Habitat's Regional Office for Africa is essentially an action plan based on the goals of our Strategic Plan 2020-2023. We are only as effective as the partnerships we build with governments, city managers and local communities. I am confident that we all have the same objective of helping African countries build resilient, prosperous and peaceful cities on their own terms.

As a former mayor, please allow me to highlight that cities are the engines of sustainable growth for Africa. We need to take action immediately to prevent urban sprawl, and to reduce inequalities through integrated planning, with a strong rights-based approach. There is still time to ensure equitable access to basic services and housing. We need these cities to have strong communities, that will ensure that all emerging cities in Africa have resilience plans. We are ready to help, and our recently launched Catalogue of Services is available on our website.

2021 is a crucial year for Africa. Kigali will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and I hope you will join UN-Habitat to ensure that sustainable urbanisation is at the centre of the Commonwealth's socio-economic recovery plan.

It is UN-Habitat vision, with the upcoming Africities, to consider a dedicated focus on second cities and town. They are the acupuncture points that link urban and rural. They are small enough for us to translate policy into practice. They are each looking to create a niche of economic function, that contributes to a network of resilience and reliability. COVID-19 has shown that every nation needs their own national network of second cities, to ensure we generate jobs and livelihoods for all.

To ensure full success of the event, I already designated a technical team to support the Government of Kenya and the county of Kisumu for the organization of Africities. And our collaboration with UCGL-Africa has always yielded positive outcome, in mobilizing local government for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

As I conclude, I reaffirm UN-Habitat's commitment to the ongoing collaborations and partnerships with Government of Kenya, and our resolve to support Africities 2021 Summit.

Thank you. Asante Sana!