



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME  
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**FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE**

## **OPENING REMARKS**

# **Speech by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat for World Habitat Day 2025**

**6 October 2025**

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to World Habitat Day 2025 here at the UN compound in Nairobi. This year's theme – Urban Crisis Response – could not be timelier.

By the end of 2024, more than 123 million people were uprooted by conflict, political instability, and climate fragility – most of them ending up in towns and cities.

Crises today are overwhelmingly urban. They destroy homes, collapse services, and disrupt critical infrastructure. Each year, disasters add to this toll, damaging or destroying more than 92,000 essential facilities and causing 1.6 million service disruptions worldwide.

The global housing crisis affects nearly 3 billion people, with 1.1 billion living in informal settlements and slums, and over 300 million experiencing homelessness. If we do not plan for displaced populations in urban areas, informality – and the housing crisis – will only deepen.

We must put housing, land, and basic services at the centre of solutions for urban crises and displacement.

In Sudan, over 12.8 million people are displaced, including 8.8 million within the country. Millions are now concentrated in towns and cities already struggling to provide housing and services.

In Gaza, more than 92 percent of homes have been destroyed or severely damaged, displacing nearly 2 million people. The entire population has been affected, and the humanitarian crisis is extreme.

Humanitarian aid is essential, but it is not enough. People want to regain their homes – old or new – as soon as possible. We need to think earlier about recovery, and government- and community-led solutions.

Local governments are the firefighters on the frontline of urban crises. At the same time, they are also the champions of solutions, responding to the aspirations of their communities and building resilience for the future. Yet they cannot deliver without stronger capacity, reliable financing, and supportive policy frameworks.

Strengthening these capacities and linking humanitarian and development efforts are central to UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2026–2029, which identifies crisis response as one of its three key impact areas – covering contexts of displacement, disaster, conflict, and climate fragility.

Next year, at the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 17 to 22 May 2026, the global community will gather under the theme “Housing the world: Safe and resilient cities and communities.” That discussion will build on today's message – that housing is not only a basic need, but also the cornerstone of recovery and resilience.

On this World Habitat Day, let us be clear: crisis response must be an urban response.

Housing, land, and services must be at the centre.

Local governments must be empowered and enabled.

And displacement must be seen not only as a humanitarian challenge, but as a development opportunity – to build more inclusive, resilient cities for the future.