



WELCOME REMARKS

BY

**H.E. MR. COLLEN V. KELAPILE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)**

AT THE

ECOSOC SPECIAL MEETING

ON

***"SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION AND THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA"***

**21 APRIL 2022
10:00 – 13:00 HOURS**

ECOSOC CHAMBER

Please check against delivery.

- **Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the UN General Assembly;**
- **Madam Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Amina J. Mohammed;**
- **Excellency Ms. Martha Delgado, President of the UN Habitat Assembly;**
- **Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat;**
- **Excellencies;**
- **Distinguished Delegates;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

1. I am honoured to welcome you to the Special Meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on **“Sustainable Urbanization and the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda.”**

2. The issue of sustainable urbanization is of topical importance in a world where already more than half of the population is living in cities and where majority of population growth will end up in cities in the future, either due to natural growth or due to migration.

- 3.** As such, our sustainable development will very much hinge on how we manage urbanization.
- 4.** This Special Meeting has been convened as an opportunity to examine sustainable urbanization through the lens of inequality – a key priority of my ECOSOC Presidency- and to review the support provided by the UN development system to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, as part of the Council’s mandate to coordinate the work of the UN system.
- 5.** The world has transformed since the New Urban Agenda was adopted in 2016. Our discussions today need to be framed within the context of the COVID-19 response and recovery and other global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- 6.** The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically highlighted the state of inequality. It has deepened and made more visible existing inequalities and created new vulnerabilities within and among all regions of the world.

- 7.** As noted in the Policy Brief of the UN Secretary-General on **COVID-19 in an Urbanizing World**, as well as in the UN-Habitat Report, **Cities and Pandemics**, structural inequalities are pervasive and have determined pandemic outcomes.
- 8.** Throughout the Global South, people with inadequate housing, the many with fragile livelihoods, and the **1.2 billion people** living in informal settlements and slums have struggled to implement the preventive disease transmission measures, often suffering most.
- 9.** In the Global North, not all could reorganize homes and connections for remote learning and work, implement the stay-at-home measure or stop risky activities. Low paid workers on long commutes and doing essential jobs were exposed to higher risk.
- 10.** Dependency on welfare and social protection, where available, increased manifold. Many entered the ranks of the homeless population.

- 11.** In response, Governments worldwide adopted unprecedented measures to tackle such vulnerabilities and gaps. Cities, in particular, have deployed creative actions.
- 12.** They have provided services in underserved areas, leveraged their public spaces for services, recreation and to livelihoods, and provided shelter to the homeless. The examples are numerous.
- 13.** New urban models have emerged, with more attention for the human scale, the pedestrian, the mix of land uses.
- 14.** The COVID-19 pandemic has made more visible the power of collective action and solidarity, and the role of the public actor, including of local Governments.
- 15.** We need to learn from these experiences and find innovative ways to tackle the underlying causes of inequality while we recover from the pandemic and build resilience.

Excellencies,

- 16.** The second part of the theme of this meeting focuses on the support provided by the United Nations development system to countries in implementing the New Urban Agenda. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the impact of the United Nations reforms launched in 2018 to improve the way the Organization works.
- 17.** By and large, the UN development system was found to be better prepared to help countries overcome the crisis, to deliver a solid health and humanitarian response and to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as part of recovery efforts.
- 18.** The New Urban Agenda similarly calls for a whole-of-system approach and for integrated, transformative action. It calls for the UN Country Teams to work differently, under the leadership of an empowered Resident Coordinator and engaging with local actors at all levels.

- 19.** Delivering on SDG 11 on sustainable cities and human settlements contributes to SDG 5 on gender equality, while also contributing to SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, to SDG 3 on good health and well-being, SDG 6 on water and sanitation for all, to mention just a few.
- 20.** Proper investments in inclusive, sustainable urban planning and provision of basic services result in numerous co-benefits.
- 21.** The impacts of climate change on our cities and critical infrastructure is an issue that can no longer be ignored. It is real and continues to disrupt urban lives especially those most vulnerable, as recently witnessed with the devastating floods in South Africa a few days ago.
- 22.** I therefore urge UN-Habitat to work with relevant stakeholders to explore the role of Data, Science, Technology and Innovation in mitigation and adaptation to build resilient cities.

Excellencies,

- 23.** This Session provides the opportunity to learn more from the UN colleagues on the implementation of the UN system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development -- and how it is enabling the United Nations to assist Member States in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, with direct contributions to sustainable development.

- 24.** As you would be aware, the 2022 theme of the Council and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is **“Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”**

- 25.** With less than 8 years remaining in the timeframe set to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we must work even harder together to maximize synergies and address trade-offs to build forward a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient future.

26. I look forward to fruitful deliberations, and wish you all a productive dialogue which should result in concrete outcomes to feed into the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly to be held on 28 April.

I thank you for your kind attention.