



**UN System Chief Executives Board
Joint Statement to the United Nations Conference
on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)**

The opportunity of urbanization

1. Throughout history, urbanization has been a powerful force for human progress, cultural, scientific and technological innovation, and economic and social development. As we look ahead, urbanization is equally likely to be central to the great changes that humanity will undergo this century: changes in our climate and physical environment, changes in the physical location and demographic makeup of the human family, and changes in our societies and economies. Urbanization is, in short, at the heart of the sustainable development challenges confronting us — and offers uniquely powerful opportunities for rising to these challenges. We, Chief Executives of the United Nations system, stand ready to assist Member States in seizing this historic opportunity.

2. The Rio+20 Outcome document recognized that well-planned and developed cities are central to sustainable development. In Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States committed to “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” To achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States will need to formulate a New Urban Agenda that is both universal and suited to different contexts, that both fosters innovation and creativity and simultaneously leaves no one behind.

3. Urbanization is a force which, if effectively steered and deployed, offers unique opportunities for sustainable growth, productive employment and greater wellbeing. Cities today account for 70 per cent of global GDP. Well-planned, inclusive, safe and resilient cities and human settlements can assist us to address poverty, inequality, poor health, environmental degradation, climate change, disaster risk, fragility and conflict, and to protect human rights.

The challenges of urbanization

4. While urbanization offers unique opportunities, we recognize that it also poses many challenges, including environmental and socio-economic ones. Cities currently contribute between 37 and 49 per cent of the world’s total greenhouse gas emissions. Urban lifestyles along with demographic density and human interaction practices impact disease patterns and air pollution in novel ways. The socio-economic changes inherent in urbanization can also lead to inequality, marginalization and discrimination. We acknowledge that levels of human insecurity and ill health as well as gaps in education and income in cities are increasing; that hunger and malnutrition continue to exist in many cities; and that violence and discrimination, particularly against women and girls, continue. We also reaffirm the importance of ensuring the inclusion and participation of older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and minorities. We call attention to the growth of slums and the growth in the number of homeless people. We also recognize the increasing urban impact of displacement and marginalization; increasing levels of crime and violent conflict in some cities; and that corruption is a recurring feature of urban development. Cities are also especially vulnerable to the effects of disasters and other shocks.

5. All of these challenges underscore the need to strengthen urban planning and management, and disaster risk reduction efforts, and resilience building to ensure the cities of the future are safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable, and that urban communities are ready to cope with urban emergencies.

Our commitment

6. As this historic opportunity of rapid urbanization unfolds in the years ahead, we commit ourselves to working with Member States to implement the New Urban Agenda emerging from the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) within the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

7. To this end, the UN system has adopted ten guiding principles and ten key levers of transformative change towards sustainable urbanization. Now, we commit, through our organizations' programming and through engagement with our governing bodies, to use our organizations' resources and expertise to promote:

- a. A new vision of urbanization that is **universal and adaptable** to different national circumstances and that is based on the key urbanization opportunities and challenges shared by all countries. We look forward to assisting Member States to ensure universal access to quality health, education and nutrition services, and to address the basic needs, such as water and sanitation, and protect the human rights of the hundreds of millions of urban dwellers currently living in poverty;
- b. An **integrated and risk-informed approach** to managing urbanization, simultaneously addressing the environmental, social and economic objectives of sustainability, including rural-urban linkages and the concerns of different levels of government, including local governments;
- c. Mechanisms and procedures of urbanization that **respect, protect and promote human rights** and social justice. We will help Member States put in place transparent and accountable policies, laws, institutions and finance systems for achieving sustainable urban development and inclusive economic growth, as well as increasing synergies with the provision of basic services;
- d. Efforts to bring **equality and non-discrimination**, including gender equality, to the centre of urban development. We will work with Member States to strengthen inclusive urban economic activity, create equitable employment opportunities and decent work as well as improve existing working conditions for all;
- e. The **empowerment of civil society and other stakeholders**, meaningful participation and consultation in decision-making processes, expanded democratic participation and reinforced multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration which would also contribute to enhanced service delivery;
- f. The strengthening of **spatial planning** and urban design, transparent and accountable systems of governance and municipal finance as well as policies and strategies that facilitate **economic growth**, structural economic transformation, and job creation, both in urban areas and along the rural-urban continuum, by working with national and local governments;
- g. **Green cities and environmental sustainability**, which involves establishing a critical connection between science, technology, environment, industry, economic growth, resource use, urban planning and governance. We commit ourselves to promoting knowledge-based climate change mitigation and adaptation measures at the city level; strategies and actions for reducing the vulnerability of cities to disasters and enhancing their resilience; integrated approaches to land use, urban planning, use of information and communication technologies, and infrastructure development; and strategies for developing low-carbon, resource-efficient and smart cities;
- h. Efficient use of resources based on a sound understanding of the interactions of natural and human systems ('**urban metabolism**'), and the specific challenges of promoting sustainable public health in urban contexts, including addressing non-communicable diseases, mental health, traffic accidents, and ensuring universal health coverage;
- i. Solutions that work to reduce the vulnerability and enhance the resilience of populations in **cities and human settlements** most at risk to multiple and interlocking natural shocks and human-made crises;
- j. An **innovation-based approach** to urbanization that promotes connected cities, facilitates learning and the sharing of knowledge, which entails the creation of supportive learning, science, technology and innovation policies as well as development of capacities; and
- k. A global **data revolution** for effective, results-based implementation and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda at the local, national, regional and global levels through sharing of data and information.
- l. Urbanization which is **people-centered** and leverages on governance systems, policies and management in a way that actively supports human well-being and human development.