

Agenda item 1 – Opening of the session

Executive Director's Opening Speech

Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director-General of the United Nations Office Nairobi

His Excellency Marek Garztecki, Chair of the Executive Board and the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Poland to UN-Habitat

Honourable Martha Delgado, President of the UN-Habitat Assembly

Honourable Charles Hinga, Principal Secretary of the State Department for Housing and Urban Development and Head of the Delegation of the Republic of Kenya representing our Host Country Kenya,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of the UN-Habitat Executive Board

Your Excellencies

Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and gentlemen

A very Good morning, Good afternoon and Good evening to all of you.

1. Let me thank my sister Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Director-General of the United Nations Office of Nairobi and her team as well as our Host Country, the Government of Kenya, for enabling us to meet in hybrid modality in Nairobi. I take note of the precautionary actions taken by UNON to ensure we have a smooth first Executive Board meeting of the year 2022. This is much appreciated.

2. Let me take this opportunity to thank the General Assembly for electing me to a second term of two years as Executive Director. I look forward to working closely with Member States to ramp up the implementation of our Strategic Plan and to bring UN-Habitat towards financial sustainability.
3. There are two mega-trends that are irreversible. At the recently concluded UNEA 5.2, Member States recognised that urgent actions are needed to keep the planet within 1.5 degrees of climate warming. Political instability will intensify as we compete for depleting natural resources. Water and topsoil - the building blocks of human settlements - will be running out without immediate integrated planning action worldwide.
4. The second mega-trend is rapid urbanisation. [By 2050, 70% of humanity will live in urban areas. Today more than 1.6 billion of us are housed inadequately and 15 million are forcibly evicted every year. In the most advanced cities, growing income inequality and unaffordable housing have combined to create the largest number of homeless in the developed world.](#) If these trends continue, housing will be out of reach of most young people born in 2010.
5. [Conflicts are also increasing the number of internally displaced persons and many have become refugees. This places extreme pressure on cities and basic services worldwide. In 2021, according to UNHCR, 84 million persons were forcibly displaced. 68% are from five countries. I visited the cities most impacted in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Poland and Colombia. Let me acknowledge and thank these Member States for their commitment of urban basic services to support these refugees.](#)

6. Now is not the time to lose hope and we need to invest more in the multilateral system. Global action to restore the planet starts with human settlements. We have seen how those at the front line of the Covid-19 pandemic came together, shared information, shared resources and prevented what would have been an even more tragic death rate.
7. UN-Habitat worked with more than 1,400 cities galvanising support from local governmental networks to improve urban basic services. We mobilised over 2,000 cities to advocate for climate action. Together with other UN agencies, we were present in post-conflict and post-disaster areas where our expertise was needed.
8. Do you want us to do more? If the answer is yes then we need your support to help the most vulnerable cities and communities through immediate humanitarian action. UN-Habitat is the agency for local action. [It is time to move from normative guidance to treaties and binding action plans. Please support my urgent call to action on housing, climate action and localising the SDGs before it is too late.](#)
9. Let me also thank Member States and our donors for their continued support through earmarked and soft-earmarked funding. 2021 was a difficult year for us as we lost substantial funding for our biggest country programme in Afghanistan. [I am glad to say that we are building up our portfolio there again as well as strengthen our ability to support the wider UN system through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) of the United Nations.](#) I call upon Member States to please provide much needed grants and donations to the UN from which we derive support for our programmes in the most vulnerable cities and communities.

10. Finally, I look forward to your support for the financial plan that I have put in place to ensure the long term sustainability of UN-Habitat. I understand that we will not be deciding on our budget for 2023 during this session of the Executive Board but it is important for Member States to speak with one voice in support of the cost reduction plan that we have put in place in line to the advise from the Secretary-General, who has decided to prioritise UN-Habitat for the first time in two decades.

11. I look forward to a robust and pragmatic session over the next three days. Let us arrive at decisions we can all support and backed up by the resources we need to get the job done.

Thank you, Excellency Chair

(749 words)