

27 October 2021

Opening Remarks by Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Chairman of the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS) and Former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations:

In my capacity as the Chairman of the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS), I extend a very warm welcome to all the participants at this Sixteenth Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS 2021). This annual gathering focusing on the new urban agenda with wide-ranging participation of variety of stakeholders from various parts of the globe is taking place for the second time as a virtual event, this time in a hybrid format, because of the continuing global pandemic bringing immense, varied challenges to the humanity and to our planet. Taking place parallelly with CoP-26 now being held in Glasgow, GFHS 2021

aims to unite world cities to tackle climate change towards sustainability.

At the outset let me say how much I appreciate and value the presence of several key global voices who would share their wisdom and activism with the Forum participants. Among them are Professor Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General of World Meteorological Organization; Dr. Bambang Susantono, Vice President for Knowledge Management & Sustainable Development at Asian Development Bank; Dr. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity; Dr. Awni Behnam, Former United Nations Assistant Secretary General, Honorary President, International Ocean Institute; Mr. Marco Lambertini, Director General, World Wildlife Fund International; Mr. Kazushige Endo, Director, United Nations Centre for Regional Development and Dr. Frank

Rijsberman, Director General, Global Green Growth Institute. Last but not the least; I am also joined by my GFHS colleagues Taj Hamad, our dear Vice Chairman and Lu Haifeng, our dynamic Secretary General.

In this annual session, 25 leading organizations are onboard, including 10 major UN agencies, notably World Meteorological Organization (WMO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic and Social Commission in Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), as well as a number of well-known regional and international institutions, including the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, Global

Green Growth Institute (GGGI), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

Over the past 16 years, GFHS has been providing a global platform for high-level dialogue on urban issues and promoting sustainable cities and human settlements for all. As reflected in our concept outline, this Forum would “address how cities can use green recovery as a golden opportunity to kick-start a green transformation and drive innovation at all levels and across all sectors, thus enhancing urban safety, resilience, and inclusiveness, boosting green growth, and achieving coordinated, healthy, and high-quality sustainable urban development.”

In my remarks today I would present a broader perspective of the human settlements agenda in a global setting. At the outset, let me assert the centrality of sustainability in all our

endeavours and initiatives for global development, progress and prosperity. Sustainable development is the fundamental, intergenerational responsibility of our societies' efforts which benefits all.

We are experiencing the beginning of a *new urban era*. It is projected that globally urbanization levels will rise dramatically in the next 35 years to reach 70 percent by 2050. We thus live at a time of unprecedented, rapid, irreversible urbanization.

Urban growth is most rapid in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5-6 million residents every month. As cities grow in size and population, harmony among the spatial, social and environmental aspects of a city and between their inhabitants becomes of paramount importance. UN has said rightly that:

“Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities.”

Urbanization offers unprecedented opportunities for increasing living standards, life expectancy and literacy levels, environmental sustainability, and more efficient use of increasingly scarce natural resources.

However, a gendered perspective of urban poverty highlights fundamental issues of equality and social justice by showing women’s unequal position in the urban labor market, their limited ability to secure assets independently from male relatives and their greater exposure to violence.

Also, beyond the specific technocratic solutions of economics and governance, several core ideas form, I believe, the

ideological underpinnings of the New Urban Agenda. Democratic development and respect for human rights feature prominently, for instance, as does the relationship between the environment and urbanization.

Similarly, the New Urban Agenda includes significant focus on equity in the face of globalization, as well as how to ensure the safety and security of everyone who lives in urban areas, of any gender, age, and background.

As we observe the World Cities Day this year, our focus should be on creating the need for more innovative and sustainable, climate-resilient solutions while addressing a range of related issues including poverty reduction, ensuring basic services and livelihoods, the provision of adequate housing, investing in infrastructure and smart cities. **Successful,**

well-governed cities greatly reduce climate-related risks for their populations and for our planet as a whole.

Cities have the potential to shape the future of humankind and to win the battle for sustainable development. Cities are at the forefront of the global battle against climate change. In the last two decades, cities and urban centres have become the dominant habitats for humankind and the engine-rooms of human development. As such, the leadership role of mayors and city governments is of fundamental importance.

It is therefore significant that GFHS has, since its establishment in 2005, been focusing on these challenges at each of its annual conferences. This Sixteenth Forum is again another timely, relevant, and appropriate

initiative that is aimed at making the international community alert and proactive about the issues of urbanization in a holistic manner.

For over a decade and a half, GFHS has been working tirelessly to promote, implement and contribute to the realization of global habitat agenda as updated regularly through various international initiatives through concrete actions including convening annual conferences, organizing relevant capacity-building events, hosting sustainable cities and human settlements awards, developing International Green Model City (IGMC) Standards including rating system, running World Best Practices Magazine and other publications, among others. The agenda of GFHS also has been giving special attention to “Women and Children in the Rapidly Urbanizing World”.

Let me conclude by underscoring that sustainable urban development is one of the most pressing challenges facing the human community in the 21st century. As more and more people make cities their home, cities will be the arenas in which some of the world's biggest social, economic, environmental, and political challenges will be faced and need to be addressed collectively.

I wish all of you a purposeful observance of the World Cities Day and productive holding of the 2021 Annual Session of GFHS all success in every way.
