

**OPENING ADDRESS**

**BY**

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(GFHS)**

**FORMER UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**AND**

**HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**at**

**the 17<sup>th</sup> annual conference of  
the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS)**

***Virtual Zoom Platform, 15 December 2022***

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Greetings to all the distinguished participants! It is 1.00 am now in New York, the city which is proud to host 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 who have joined us from various part of the globe at the 17th annual conference of the Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS XVII) being held virtually. This is the third consecutive virtual conference for us since 2020. I extend a special welcome to the distinguished Mayors and other city representatives who are gracing our session.

I appreciate and value the presence of several key participants who would share their expertise and experience with the Forum participants.

Among them are:

Prof. Petteri Taalas, Secretary General, World Meteorological Organization

Dr. Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary, The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (video message)

Mr. Kazushige Endo, Director, United Nations Centre for Regional Development in Japan

Dr. Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Office of Sustainable Development Goals, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; and,

Mr. Huang Shaozhong, Director, China Energy Research Society-Carbon Neutral Industry Cooperation Center.

Allow me also to convey, on behalf of GFHS, my sincere thanks to all co-organizers and collaborators for their huge support to GFHS. There are 24 organizations, including 10 UN agencies and other partner organizations with whom GFHS worked together to successfully organize this 17<sup>th</sup> annual conference.

Last but not the least - I am delighted to say that I am joined by my GFHS colleagues, Taj Hamad, our dear Vice Chairman, Lu Haifeng, our dynamic Secretary General and Christine He, our hard-working Deputy Secretary General.

Over the past 17 years, GFHS has been providing a global platform for high-level dialogue on urban issues and promoting sustainable cities and human settlements for all.

Our theme for this conference is "Together for a shared safer and greener urban future : resilient, carbon-neutral and nature-positive cities".

Last month the world's population surpassed its 8-billion-mark. It is projected that globally urbanization levels will rise dramatically in less than three decades to reach 70 percent by 2050. We thus live at a time of unprecedented, rapid, irreversible urbanization.

As we all acknowledge, the New Urban Agenda adopted at the UN conference in Quito, Ecuador in 2016, is about people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships in urban settings.

Habitat destruction is one of the biggest challenges that the world is facing now. The theme for this year's World Habitat Day was "Mind the Gap. Leave No One and Place Behind", focusing on the growing inequalities and challenges in cities and human settlements. On that Day, UN Secretary-General said reflecting the global reality that "Today, over one billion people live in overcrowded settlements with inadequate housing..."

It is now universally accepted that "Sustainable development hinges on fate of world's cities." The international community is valuing the growing importance of cities and local governments. The New Urban Agenda (NUA) recognizes the essential role of local governments in advancing sustainable development, driving climate action and building an inclusive and resilient

future for all. The role of cities in tackling global challenges has enhanced their legitimacy within the international arena.

Evaluating the challenges during five years since the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, this year UN experts identified the following manifestations –

- one, Urban areas are increasingly epicenters of crises, insecurity, and violence, fueling displacement and forced migration;
- two, Housing remains largely unaffordable both in the developing and developed world;
- three, Feminization of urban poverty. Female-headed households in slums and informal settlements are growing. All of these forms of exclusion disproportionately affect women, youth, older persons, migrants, and other marginalized groups. 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; and,
- four, Accelerating urban action for a carbon-free world. As cities are responsible for some 70 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, 11,000 cities have committed to developing comprehensive climate action plans under the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy to create sustainable, carbon-neutral, inclusive cities and towns. I would encourage the participating Mayors and other city leaders to join this initiative in increasing numbers.

With the urban population of the world set to escalate over the next few decades, it has become even more important to understand the role of cities in the area of climate change and in producing carbon emissions.

It goes without saying that local democracy coupled with good governance at the local levels is a key factor for the brighter future of all cities. When States treat local authorities as partners and allow urban

residents a voice in the way their streets, stores and workplaces are managed, cities are usually more efficient and livable. Such cities in turn enhance democracy nationally and make local and national economies stronger.

The theme of this year's World Urban Forum very appropriately was "Transforming Our Cities for a Better Urban Future".

In his Quadrennial Report Issued in March 2022, on [p](#)rogress in the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda (2019-2022) issued in March this year, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres identified "New Urban Agenda as an accelerator of global development agendas". UN General Assembly has highlighted the contribution of the New Urban Agenda to the localization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development showing how these two global agendas are intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

I have the pleasure to inform you about my keynote address at the Tenth General Conference of Mayors for Peace, an organization which has more than 8200 cities from all parts of the world, in Hiroshima, Japan last October. The title of my keynote speech was "*Advancing the Culture of Peace to Create a Better World with Communities at the Center*". In the last two decades, cities and urban communities have become the dominant driving force for human development.

The New Urban Agenda called on the cities to "enhance social and intergenerational interactions ... and foster social cohesion, inclusion and safety in peaceful and pluralistic societies...". It further called on the cities to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal rights in all fields and in leadership at all levels of decision-making ..." It also reflected the commitment of the cities "to ensure human development and build peaceful,

inclusive and participatory societies, as well as to promote living together, connectivity and social inclusion.”

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. As such, the leadership role of mayors and city governments is of fundamental importance.

It is also significant that GFHS has, since its establishment, been focusing on these challenges at each of its annual conferences. The current 17<sup>th</sup> annual conference of GFHS is again another timely and relevant gathering that is aimed at making the international community alert and proactive on global habitat agendas.

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