



## **SPEECH**

### **Opening remarks by Anacláudia Rossbach, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat, at the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12)**

**Monday, 4 November 2024**

Your Excellency, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
Your Excellency, Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine  
Your Excellency, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, President of the Republic of Sudan  
Your Excellency, Rashad al-Alimi, President of the Presidential Leadership Council of the Republic of Yemen  
Your Excellency, Mostafa Madbouly, Prime Minister of Egypt  
Honourable Ministers, Honourable Mayors  
Distinguished delegates, all protocols observed  
Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon! Messa el kheir!

First, I would like to recognize the fantastic partnership with the government of Egypt for this WUF edition, our co-hosts, who worked tirelessly to bring us here. A big thank you to all authorities and staff engaged in bringing us here today!

Second, I would like to remind us all about the genesis of WUF: it was approved by the UNGA 23 years ago in 2001 as a non-legislative conference, a place for stakeholders to come and share. It was later also recognized as one of the platforms for monitoring and reporting on the New Urban Agenda, our common global commitment to sustainable urbanization.

I also would like to recognize its increasing global relevance among the urban community & beyond since its creation, attracting more and more new segments and stakeholders, also from different sectors. People and institutions that are concerned with the future of our planet and understand the critical role cities play in defining it.

Thank you, all participants, here in person and online for joining WUF from all corners of the world- we had registered participants from more than 182 countries, represented by 4 Heads of States, 72 ministers, 51 deputy ministers, and 96 mayors! You make WUF what it is- a powerful platform connecting actors and networks of actors to drive transformation across our cities and communities.



We have truly reached an unprecedented milestone in the journey of WUF – we have seen tremendous growth and immense visibility at this Forum.

Indeed, WUF is one of the most important assets of UN-Habitat, and there is universal consensus about it. An asset that I am committed to preserve and make it even more stronger throughout my mandate, it will be a strong pillar for UN Habitat's new strategic plan for the period 2026 - 29, and to support our role in assuring the recognition of human rights, and addressing global challenges such as climate change, and the global housing crisis with its diversity of features and intersections around the world: humanitarian emergencies, informal settlements, homelessness and housing affordability.

WUF also happens in the context of the Pact of the Future, just approved by consensus a couple of months ago during the Summit of the Future in NY, back-to-back to the United Nations General Assembly. The Pact of the Future recognizes the importance of the NUA, housing and cities, the relevance of local and regional governments; it also addresses the challenges and opportunities related to digitalization and technology, which is closely connected with our efforts in promoting people-centered smart cities; the reforms of the financial architecture where the urban physical and social infrastructure gaps could gain more centrality in terms of funding; and most importantly the legacy we will leave to future generations, the critical role youth play now and their importance in shaping the future. The WUF is the first big UN related conference to take place after the approval of the Pact and we hope discussions here can help gather critical mass and practical action in support of its implementation. The outcomes of this session of WUF, including the Cairo Call to Action, will no doubt convey a strong unified message from urban stakeholders for local action.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the importance of the WUF in Egypt, and its legacy for the city, for the country, for UN Habitat and the global urban community. A city and a country full of culture, an aspect that has been undervalued and underestimated by our society when it comes to cities. As we are concerned with our daily routine and how cities help us (or not) in fulfilling our obligations, we often forget about the intangible aspects of the city, its social capital, its culture and heritage. It will be impossible to be blind to that while in Cairo, the discussions of the World Cities Day in Alexandria, and Cairo Urban Week provided critical mass and elements for the upcoming debates at WUF. I hope this stays as legacy for the work of UN Habitat, for the urban community, for Cairo and Egypt. Culture was never so relevant, in times of change and uncertainty, of disasters and conflicts, culture is our anchor, it helps us to find comfort and gives us the needed stability to act now and envisage the future. Cities are essential to preserve our culture, and culture is fundamental for the society (especially in an increasingly urbanized planet), for citizens living in cities, or the ones living in rural areas, who should be able to easily access the urban economic, social and development opportunities available in cities.

So, again Cairo and Egypt thanks for co-hosting the biggest WUF ever, where more than 37,000 have registered as participants, and importantly, we have achieved gender parity among our 407 speakers for the 37 main sessions - 201 male speakers and 206 female

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speakers. I look forward to having lively debate, co-create and exchange, a great global coalition.

Thank you.