

## **U.S. Statement: May 18 Opening Session of New Urban Agenda Negotiations**

The United States would like to commend and thank the Habitat III Preparatory Bureau and the Secretariat for this initial effort to bring together a host of inputs, from national reports and policy unit papers to the outcomes of regional and thematic meetings, into this first draft of the New Urban Agenda. We recognize the enormity of the task and appreciate the effort to integrate the views not only of member states, but from all stakeholders, including civil society, subnational, and local authorities.

The New Urban Agenda presents an important opportunity to identify what we've learned since Habitat II, recognize the challenges faced by cities the world over, and identify solutions for sustainable and inclusive urban development. This is also an important and early opportunity to reflect on the historic global achievements of 2015—which set important new paths for sustainable development, financing for development, and climate change—and translate them into local action in all countries. We must ask ourselves at every step along the way, is the NUA enabling the development of sustainable and inclusive cities?

The most meaningful output of this process should be action. The New Urban Agenda should catalyze action by expanding access to the solutions-based policy knowledge and guidance cities need; facilitating the multi-layer governance conversation necessary to develop coherent, vertically integrated policy; and enabling cities to develop and access the financing they need to pursue action.

We are pleased to see that this first draft recognizes the role of all stakeholders and incorporates their views on fostering cities that are economically productive, inclusive, well-governed, environmentally sound, sustainable, healthy, resilient, and secure. The New Urban Agenda should build consensus around these key issues. As we begin our discussions of the draft, we hope to maintain focus on such important priorities, and avoid issues that lack broad recognition and support among the international community, including the identification of new rights.

We were also pleased to see the draft recognize that urban solutions should come from, and take into account the views from all levels of government. National governments have an important role to play by creating the enabling environment in which local solutions can be developed and both cities and people can thrive. Sustainable urban development requires two-way communication, coordination and planning that goes from the local to regional to national. We would like the New Urban Agenda to promote this kind of vertical integration and foster local initiatives that are outcome oriented and eschew top-down one-size-fits-all approaches.

How urbanization takes shape in the near future will substantially influence whether cities become drivers of innovation and economic growth, social inclusion, climate solutions, and resiliency or whether they deepen inequalities, inhibit economic growth, accelerate disease outbreaks, and exacerbate climate risks, with far-reaching global implications.

Because the stakes are so high, we believe that the New Urban Agenda will be most effective if it is clear, focused, concise, coherent, and actionable. We believe that the elements for success are there, but as it stands, principles and actions are blurred between the sections, making the draft difficult to follow. We suggest that the flow and purpose of the New Urban Agenda may be better served by designating paragraphs related to principles to section A and those related to implementation to section B.

The United States government takes the goals, aspirations, and commitments in the New Urban Agenda seriously but notes that it is a non-binding declaration and that the language should reflect this. We also note that there are many terms used throughout the document that are not clear and encourage that such language be replaced by terms that are clearly and widely understood. We urge member states and the Preparatory Bureau to work in this regard toward a New Urban Agenda that is focused, more concise, practical and ready for implementation.

Most importantly the New Urban Agenda should illuminate policies that have clear practices and programs that promote action. We need action in many areas, including access to adequate housing and sustainable and nutritious food, provision of healthcare and other basic services, integrated approaches to provision of services and infrastructure development, creating communities of opportunities that help people to rise out of poverty, and generally improve urban life. The key to the success of the New Urban Agenda is to make it a vehicle for global platforms and partnerships that enable all stakeholders to find solutions to global challenges that play out at local levels – such as climate change and violent extremism.

Many stakeholders, within and outside of the UN system, have robust urban portfolios, and we believe it overly restrictive to designate any one organization to take the lead on follow-up and review. We therefore oppose the expansion of the mandates of UN-Habitat as the lead for follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda. Discussions and decisions regarding UN-Habitat as an organization are better left to its Governing Council. Including such issues in the New Urban Agenda will only distract from its intended purpose, which is to provide a framework of action for all stakeholders to address the challenges of sustainable urbanization. The New Urban Agenda should be accomplished by the Member States', including by working through international, local, regional and national entities. It is up to member states, communities, and other stakeholders to determine roles on a case-by-case basis, putting those best placed to drive local action and results in the lead.

Thank you.

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IO/EDA:KMonahan –(ok)  
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