

Speech by Parks Tau, President of UCLG and Co-Chair of the High-Level Independent Panel to Assess and Enhance the Effectiveness of UN-Habitat

Session: Introduction of the evidence-based and independent assessment of UN-Habitat by the Independent Panel

Tuesday 5 September, 10:20am, Trusteeship Council Chamber, UNHQ New York City

Excellencies, Partners, Colleagues and Friends,

Good morning to you all.

Let me start by extending my thanks to the President of the UN General Assembly, **His Excellency, Peter Thomson**, for convening this important meeting. My deepest thanks, too, go to **Dr. Joan Clos**, UN-Habitat staff and all member states and partners that have provided very useful inputs. Finally, thank you to the UN Secretary General's office, particularly Deputy Secretary General **Amina Mohamed**, for the invitation to serve on the panel.

The task of Co-Chairing this Panel has been a great responsibility and an enormous privilege. I would like to **commend my fellow panel members** for their dedication and commitment to the process, despite the tight calendar.

Today I speak to you as Co-Chair of the Panel, but as a local leader I brought to the Panel my strong conviction of the need to **harness the New Urban Agenda as a framework** for sustainable development across the world. There is no doubt that we need renewed institutions, governance systems and partnerships to achieve this.

There was great consensus on the Panel on this point, as well as among all the stakeholder groups we interviewed, and among many member-states.

We need to acknowledge the megatrend of urbanization and see it as a territorial phenomenon that does not only affect urbanised areas but the full organization of our territorial governance. We all agree that there is a necessary shift from an ineffective exclusionary and unsustainable model of socio-economic development to a more sustainable and equitable one, which is increasingly being referred to as the next 'great transformation'. An encouraging proliferation of sustainability-oriented 'experiments' in urban settlements and territories across the world. The future of humanity is contingent upon the way in which urban and local challenges will be addressed. Therefore, it is so important to examine what is now emerging within our urban settlements and territories in order to discern the potential dynamics of a new, inclusive and sustainable socio-economic order. To this end, the evolutionary potential of the present moment needs to be understood for possible transition pathways in the future.

At the same time, we call for 'the urban' to be understood in its broadest sense, including metropolitan areas, intermediary cities, peri-urban areas, and their rural surroundings. We **should challenge the artificial urban-rural dichotomy** and find a way in which we mainstream a **territorial approach** to development across the UN.

The challenges are so great that there needs to be total change in the way we approach development and we will need to include a greater number of actors. Our report makes a clear case for universality and for **taking the involvement of non-state actors and local governments to a different level.**

The UN System has so far failed to recognize **the "fundamental role" played by local governments in development.** This is an issue that must be addressed urgently. The

Panel is convinced that, given the adequate resources and with full ownership by Member States, **UN-Habitat can continue to play a significant role in bridging this gap**. We recommend a formal role for subnational governments in UN-Habitat through a Committee of Local Governments and a similar committee for Stakeholders.

These Committees would build on existing experiences, such as UNACLA, but would have more direct links with the Policy Board to inform on the local governance implications of decisions.

The above leads us to our report's **recommendation that a multi-agency coordinating mechanism, 'UN Urban', be set up** to champion the urban agenda across the UN. This proposal should be understood as complementary to the overall reform work and also to complement the work of UN Habitat. Further, it would ensure that the role of UN Habitat, as a focal point on sustainable urbanisation and reporting, would be realised and enhanced. The UN Urban proposal seeks to contribute to make the UN fit for purpose in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda seeking consultation and coordination mechanisms which we have not seen before.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, during the Panel's brief but intensive period of work, we have been able to see how much commitment there is among the different actors to make a significant contribution to sustainable development and peace from their cities and communities. We hope that our recommendations can inspire concrete decisions and help overcome some of the deadlocks that emerged during the Habitat III negotiations.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the report over the coming days.

Thank you.