



Country Statement - Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Delivered by H.E. Sayed Sadat Mansoor Naderi, Minister of Urban Development Affairs, on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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Surabaya, Indonesia

Your Excellency Minister Basuki Hadimulijono, Minister of Public Works and Housing, Indonesia

Your Excellency Dr. Joan Clos, Secretary General of the UN Conference on Housing and Urban Development

Your excellencies, Ministers, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen;

On behalf of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, I am grateful to be here in Surabaya, Indonesia, and present a statement at the final session of the Preparatory Committee meetings in the lead-up to HABITAT three in Quito, Ecuador in October this year. I wish to thank the Government of Indonesia for hosting this important event.

As Minister of Urban Development and Housing, I am passionate about making Afghan cities drivers of economic development and balanced prosperity. I am passionate about delivering affordable and adequate housing to all citizens in the next 20 years. I am passionate about extending services to the poorest and most vulnerable in our cities. I am passionate about empowering Mayors and Municipalities to improve transparency and accountability, citizen engagement, and service delivery with performance benchmarking. I am committed to ensuring social inclusion and gender equality in the day to day functioning of our cities.

Given the unfortunate fact that Afghanistan has been at war for over thirty years, the Habitat II Agenda from 1996 has had limited impact in our country. Habitat II came at a time when the Taliban strengthened control of our country. 'Enabling shelter strategies', 'campaigns on secure tenure', 'shelter for all', and the like, were not high on the political or development agenda. Our people suffered and we are still paying the price today.

> Your excellencies,

We have come a long way since the conflict of last decade. Today, Afghanistan is rebuilding itself and embarking on a decade of transformation under the leadership of His Excellency, President Ashraf Ghani, and His Excellency, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah. The National Unity Government has recognized the role of Afghan cities as drivers of peace, stabilization and prosperity, which is articulated in the government's reform framework - 'Realizing Self Reliance', presented at the London Conference in 2014.

To put this into practice we are developing an Urban National Priority programme (U-NPP). The U-NPP has three pillars: 1) Strengthening urban governance and institutions; 2) Affordable housing and basic urban services for all; 3) Harnessing urban economy and infrastructure.

U-NPP is not so much a 'programme' as such. It is more an overall development framework for urban sector interventions for the coming decades. The overall vision is to achieve "A network of dynamic, safe, livable urban centers that are hubs of economic growth, arenas of culture, and social inclusion through good urban governance and management." In achieving this vision, we will not lose sight of durable solutions, climate risk mitigation, disaster risk reduction, environmental sustainability and preservation of natural resources.

We strongly believe in evidence-based policy and decision-making. The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, in conjunction with other government partners, and support of UN Habitat, published two flagship publications – State of Afghan Cities 2015 Report and Atlas of Afghan City Regions 2016. These publications are laying the foundation for Afghanistan's national urban policy, U-NPP and for SDG 11 monitoring by providing a clear assessment and baseline upon which to base policy decisions. We recognize that urbanization is occurring beyond municipal boundaries and therefore, the role of city regions will increasingly gain prominence in the governance, legislation and management of urban areas.

We believe that our U-NPP is well-aligned with the New Urban Agenda and principles and best practices of 21st century transformative urban development.

> Your excellencies,

Although Afghanistan is unique in its history it shares a common feature with almost every other country: Afghanistan is urbanising and will continue to do so. Afghanistan is still a predominantly rural society with only an estimated one-third of the population living in cities. Yet this is changing fast. In 1950, only 1 out of every 20 Afghans lived in cities. In 2014, 1 out of every three Afghans lived in cities, and by 2060 1 out of every 2, that is, 50% of the population - will live in cities.

We have a growing internally displaced population and refugees returnees. The informal economy has taken stronghold in most cities urban and economic fabric, even as unemployment is rising. A large share of urban population does not have access to affordable and adequate housing and security of tenure. We face limitations in the sub-national and municipal capacity to deliver basic services and amenities to our residents.

The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing has recognized these challenges shared by many developing and least developed countries. Our urban programmes are prioritized to address these complex and interconnected challenges. Afghanistan's urban transformation has many common but differentiated underlying conditions, particularly related to security and stability, which determine the course of action.

Afghanistan welcomes the New Urban Agenda as an implementation strategy for the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 11. NUA is founded on the principles of "City for All" to ensure that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, are able to inhabit, use, and produce just, inclusive, accessible and sustainable cities, which exist as a common good essential to quality of life.

I am delighted to say that in Afghanistan we are already pioneering the NUA by implementing strategic national level urban programmes such as – Urban Solidarity Programme and Citizens Charter, to ensure Citizen's Development Rights. Citizen's Charter will contribute to the National Unity Government's efforts to break the cycle of fragility and violence, by deepening the legitimacy of the Afghan state. Afghanistan will be the first country to develop and implement a multi-sectoral and national Citizens Charter, a global first.

We recognize urban poverty as a challenge in stability and have launched President's initiative "Jobs for Peace" programme – aimed at stabilization of 10 major cities through a basic labour stimulus package. Finally, we launched "City for All" programme last week, which seeks to (i) firstly, promote effective land management and clear land rights and responsibilities; (ii) second, ensure strategic urban planning to guide investments and establish common vision, (iii) third, improve municipal governance and citizen engagement and representation. Under this programme we hope to register more than 700,000 properties in 4 years which will not only increase tenure security but also will be a move towards increasing municipal revenues.

We have already embarked on a journey of sustainable and equitable urbanization with optimism and hope that these programmes when implement will positively impact the future of millions of Afghans.

> Your excellencies,

In the process of strengthening our urban policy and programmes over the last years, we have learned valuable lessons. I would like to share them in the presence of this esteemed delegation with the hope and expectation that Afghanistan can provide tools to include in the NUA for a sustainable urban future:

- First, Governance and Institutions, particularly sub-national governance, and especially municipalities. Without strong institutions at the grassroots levels urban planning cannot take place. Without strong municipal institutions urban plans cannot be implemented and enforced. Similarly, the fight against corruption needs to be recognised and included.
- Second, peace-building, including humanitarian and early recovery efforts. A great many number of cities around the world are under threat from insurgencies, civil wars, uprisings and the like. The urban dimension on 21st century conflict needs to be recognised, particularly in terms of humanitarian support in urban areas, and breaking down the artificial 'humanitarian' - 'development' divide. Furthermore, the special circumstances of cities after conflict needs to be addressed in terms of rebuilding social ties, trust, and addressing the underlying drivers of conflict, which are often land related.
- Third, the special needs of Less Developed Countries (LDCs). LDCs face incredible challenges with urbanisation. They are usually the ones urbanizing the fastest, and almost always the ones with fewest resources. We need to ensure there is sustainable financing for urban infrastructure that is aligned with agreed plans and strategies.
- And fourth; culture, including Islamic culture. Cities do not only have economic, social and environmental aspects. Culture, arguably the fourth pillar of sustainable development, needs to be included as a key pillar of sustainable urbanisation in the New Urban Agenda.

> Your excellencies,

Afghanistan acknowledges the commitment of all stakeholders in ensuring an inclusive process towards development of the New Urban Agenda and the overall HABITAT III process. We have recognized and engendered participatory approaches in our urban programmes by involving Provincial Authorities, Municipalities and Mayors, and civil society/community groups. These stakeholders have a key role to play in defining, agreeing on, and, importantly, implementing the New Urban Agenda.

Going forward, we are affirming our position to implement the priority areas that are, national urban policies, urban legislations, territorial planning and financial frameworks, identified under the New Urban Agenda. We seek solidarity from member states for granting stronger mandate to UN-Habitat to assist governments in forwarding and implementing the NUA.

Thank you once again for this opportunity.