

The Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)

Opening Statement by H.E. Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister of Agriculture and Environment, Finland

19 October 2016, Quito, Ecuador

Thank you Mr Chair,

Let me start by extending my warm thanks to the host country Ecuador. I would also like to thank the secretariat as well as all countries and stakeholders whom have contributed to realization of this conference.

Finland fully aligns herself with the statement of the EU and its Member States.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

This third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development is addressing crucial questions of our time. How to make cities liveable to all and improve human well-being on our planet? As cities grow at an increasingly rapid pace, we cannot afford to continue business as usual.

We are living defining moments in human history. We have come to this conference to adopt a blueprint for sustainable urban development: The New Urban Agenda. It is universal and all-encompassing providing an important vehicle for operationalizing the 2030 Agenda and especially its Goal 11 on sustainable cities and human settlements.

As the world politicians, we should respond to the call of the New Urban Agenda in all its diversity. We need to ensure development that is socially just, economically viable and environmentally sound. In this context, I would like to emphasize access to basic services for all, polycentric regional development, and developing a carbon neutral society. We must not forget that good governance and an integrated approach to planning are prerequisites for sustainable cities, towns and villages.

Following the human rights -based approach, sustainable development has to be made available and affordable to all of us living in cities, municipalities and local communities. Sustainable and inclusive urban development can only become a reality if marginalization and exclusion is addressed and tackled. It is also vital that urban infrastructure and the built environment promote greater gender equality in the use and benefits of urban space.

In combatting climate change, local-level leadership and initiative is an essential factor for success. Cities, as producers of 70 percent of the world's greenhouse gases, have a crucial role in implementation of the Paris Agreement. I would like to encourage cities and towns to develop their own climate adaptation and mitigation plans. The potential of energy savings for example from the building sector are huge and remain largely untapped.

In shaping up national urban policies we cannot only focus on megacities, we also have to respond to urban challenges in a smaller scale. The total area covered by the world's cities is set to triple in the

next 40 years – eating up farmland and threatening the planetary boundaries. With smart solutions and resources allocated to both cities and rural areas, we can meet the challenge. Digitalisation and new business models such as circular and bio-economy can create new opportunities countrywide.

Mr Chairman, let me end by emphasizing the need to join our efforts. We have to engage all decision making levels, citizens, stakeholders and the civil society in implementing the New Urban Agenda. We are here to ensure that the Habitat III Conference will become a milestone in the history of sustainable urban development, providing a global vision and concrete steps in making the cities liveable for all - for at least the next twenty years.

Thank you