

Director-General's remarks for World Cities Day

31 October 2020

His Excellency Hon. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya;

Hon. Desmond Lee, Minister for National Development of Singapore;

H.E. Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union Commission;

Hon. Gong Zheng, Mayor of Shanghai, People's Republic of China;

Hon. Alexander Vysokinsky, Mayor of Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation;

Hon. James Wainaina Macharia, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, Urban Development and Public Works of the Republic of Kenya,

H.E. Hon. Wycliffe Oparanya, Chairman of the Council of Governors of Kenya;

Hon. Lee Kinyanjui, Governor of Nakuru County, Republic of Kenya;

Ms. Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa;

Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN-Habitat Executive Director;

Mr. Victor Kisob, UN-Habitat Deputy Executive Director;

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today on this occasion to commemorate World Cities Day.

Each year, as decided by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, we mark this Day to push forward cooperation to address the challenges of urbanization and contribute to sustainable urban development around the world.

This year, the format of the celebration has been altered by COVID-19, just as the pandemic has impacted so many aspects of our lives and our world.

I am pleased that the celebration has been so diligently organized in spite of the unusual circumstances, as cities play such a pivotal role in creating a better, more resilient world. Cities and communities are not only key to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, they are also on the frontlines of the response to COVID-19.

It is fitting that this year's Global Observance of World Cities Day is being hosted in Nakuru, with the sub-theme "Valuing our communities and cities." Community activities should no longer be taken for granted in urban planning, as they play an important part in building the cities of the future. Since the onset of the pandemic, local communities have played a key role in contributing to keeping people safe and maintaining some economic activities.

The latest World Cities Report, which is being launched today by H.E. President Kenyatta and UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif, highlights how engagement with all stakeholders, including local communities, can have a positive impact on fostering sustainable cities.

I wish to express my appreciation to President Kenyatta for his participation in the launch of the Report today and his leadership in championing the role of the UN in Africa. His decision to launch this report is a reflection of the Government of Kenya's commitment, not only to sustainable urban development but to advancing the United Nations agenda as a whole, including as host of the only UN Headquarters in Africa and the global South, and the third largest UN workforce in the world (after New York and Geneva).

I also must take this opportunity to thank the Kenyan Government for its steadfast support to UNON and the entire UN family in Kenya, and for its contributions to making the Nairobi duty station such a vital hub for the UN's global operations.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Kenyan's government support to the UN family in Kenya has further strengthened the partnership and solidarity between the Kenyan Government and the UN family here.

UNON, like the other headquarters duty stations around the world, is learning to adapt to the new situation and new requirements necessitated by the pandemic. We have developed a back-to-office plan for a phased return of UN staff to the compound, subject to public health indicators and other factors.

We have also developed guidelines for the organization of in-person meetings and conferences on our compound as part of our back-to-office plan. In this regard, this small in-person ceremony taking place today on the UNON compound in celebration of World Cities Day is a positive and very refreshing development.

We look forward to more meetings and events of this nature returning to the UNON compound soon.

I wish you all the best in your celebrations today.

Thank you for your attention.