

LOCAL AUTHORITY DRAFT STATEMENT
TO THE 26TH UN HABITAT GOVERNING COUNCIL

Delivered by Ms. Zandile Gumede, Mayor of Durban
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The constituency of Local and Regional Governments are most pleased to join you all once again at this Governing Council, at its first meeting after the Habitat III Conference.

We see the agreed New Urban Agenda as **an indispensable framework for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda**.

If we assume our responsibilities individually and collectively, if we develop policies according to the principles described therein, we will be creating the enabling environment we need to achieve the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Agenda.

Let's take a moment to congratulate ourselves, the Government of Ecuador, UN Habitat, the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments, the General Assembly of Partners and the Habitat III Secretariat, all of us gathered here. Let's acknowledge the important commitments we have made together in an unprecedented participatory process for the global urban community.

We will need to do this in partnership, paying special attention to **multilevel governance and subsidiarity**.

Local and regional governments bring to the table our knowledge of the needs of our communities; our knowhow; our ability to catalyze change; our flexibility and capacity to innovate. We seek acknowledgement of these roles from **national governments**; transfers of competencies and adequate resources to fully deploy our potential. We seek from civil society their trust and support, but also their advice; to show us the way and hold us accountable. From **the international community and the UN system**, in particular, we want to see urban and territorial development at the heart of the political agenda, and action to strengthen the capacities of local and regional governments. We also ask the UN to foster further decentralization policies the world round and to change the level of dialogue with us.

The topic that brings us together today – Housing – is, from our perspective, a key ingredient to the **Right to the City**, a cherished concept for our constituency. The Right to the City should bring us to the next level of inclusion policies. It should deepen our understanding of the common goods and interests in the territories we manage. Housing also gathers some of the greatest challenges that cities, large and small, in the global North and South, have to face.

Local and regional governments are on the front line of guaranteeing the right to adequate housing. On the other hand we very often have limited competences.

Still, in many countries, local governments are responsible for land-use planning, enforcing building standards, and providing emergency shelter. When national governments develop housing programs, it's usually local governments who make decisions about where housing is built or who receives housing subsidies.

SDG 11 on sustainable cities and human settlements, with its target to secure adequate, safe and affordable housing for all, is vital in this regard. SDG 11 speaks to local and regional governments around the world: from those working to upgrade slums in the rapidly growing cities of the global South, to those fighting speculation, rising rents, and the expulsion of local residents in the North.

Housing must be understood as a human right and a social good, rather than as a commodity. Social housing has a vital role to play in decommodifying housing. Public resources must be harnessed to act as a counterweight to the interests of private capital, alongside community and cooperative models. Social housing should be part of an integrated urban policy that prevents and reduces segregation by ethno-cultural or social origins. Local and regional governments can combat segregation by redesigning districts in an integrated way; providing the most disadvantaged urban areas with quality public spaces; promoting diverse land use; removing architectural barriers that can isolate certain areas, and by including a gender perspective in urban planning. Only well-coordinated metropolitan governance can prevent relentless gentrification in city centers and increasing social exclusion in peripheral cities.

Our proximity to citizens also gives local and regional governments an advantage in **gendering urban governance** through policies that tackle the structural barriers to gender inequality in daily life (transport, housing, employment, security).

The networks gathered in the Global Taskforce are working to provide **a framework to foster localization** of the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 11. For us, localizing means harnessing local priorities and resources to achieve global goals. The same goes for SDG 11 target 11.1. There is no doubt that housing is a political priority of citizens around the world, and the work of local and national governments must reflect that. We can however not do it alone. We need your support, your trust.

The NUA should give Member States renewed impetus to make progress with effective decentralization of legal competencies and resources, in order to **harness the development potential of local democracy**. The knowledge of, and proximity to, citizens of local and regional governments to citizens and their daily challenges has yet to be fully understood or captured by the international community.

We ask the members of this council to **ensure that the framework for implementation of the NUA goes beyond a technical planning guide**, that it addresses the social aspects of the NUA, and that it considers local and regional governments as more than simple implementers of national priorities but, rather, as partners responsible for integrated territorial development.