

Statement by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

UN-Habitat's Governing Council (8-12 May)
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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Without human rights, there can be no sustainable cities.

Urbanization can be a powerful constructive or destructive force. It has the potential to contribute positively to the lives of the majority of the world's population. Yet, current forms of urbanization in developed and developing countries alike, have often led to greater disparities, inequalities and discrimination and more people living in inadequate housing conditions.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda have promised to "leave no-one behind". They call for universal respect for equality and non-discrimination and reaffirm the responsibilities of all States to respect, protect and promote human rights, without discrimination or distinction of any kind.

The real test now is to see if these words are going to be put in practice or remain vague commitments. And let's be clear, if inhabitants and their rights are not put at the center of all implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, urbanization will continue generating inequalities, segregation and violence.

Concretely, advancing on these agenda will require:

- Fully integrating human rights in urban laws, policies and programmes;
- Ensuring free, active, equitable and meaningful participation of all inhabitants in urban processes, in particular of the most marginalized, and gearing these

processes toward the political, social and economic empowerment of all urban dwellers;

- Clearly establishing responsibilities between the various spheres of state authority in accordance with their human rights obligations;
- Putting in place transparent, participatory and accountable human rights measurement systems to assess the effectiveness of urban policies, programmes, budgets and processes in meeting their objectives to realize the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination;
- Prioritizing activities and budgets for addressing issues of the most vulnerable sections of city inhabitants and using the maximum of their available resources for this purposes; and
- Ensuring access to remedies for human rights violations and grievances at local level. In this regard, the examples of cities that have already put such mechanisms in place should be followed by all.

To effectively work on “leaving no one behind”, we must first identify who is left behind or who is in threat of being left behind. A human rights analysis of each country context is essential to understand who are these individuals, groups and communities. After this identification, it is important for states, international organizations, national statistical institutions, civil society organizations and the communities themselves to collect disaggregated data and monitor the progress and situation of these groups. This monitoring would allow states and local authorities to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of their policies and programme and adapt them if need be.

The human rights system provides very concrete guidance that can help implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, including on issues such as security of tenure, evictions and human rights responsibilities of business. Some, like the “Basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement” were recognized as useful tools for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (Pretoria Declaration for Habitat III on Informal Settlements).

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights avails itself to support member states, local authorities and all other stakeholders in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda from a human rights perspective. Our Office will continue to work closely with UN-Habitat on many issues including through the United Nations Housing Rights Programme, as well as with the rest of the UN system.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Cities are not just bricks and mortar. There is no city without people and there are no people without rights. Housing, education, health, water, sanitation or access to justice are human rights. And these rights cannot be treated as commodities. The New Urban Agenda will be able to fulfil its promises only if its implementation embraces this “paradigm shift”.

I thank you.
