

Habitat III plenary. Statement by State Secretary from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway, Ms Tone Skogen

Excellences, ministers, ladies and gentlemen.

Urbanization is an enormous challenge, but the New Urban Agenda provides a roadmap for how we can achieve sustainable cities for all. In short, the New Urban Agenda is about people and how we can improve their lives. We must make sure that urbanization creates cities of hope, not cities of despair.

We hope that the New Urban Agenda will mobilize, push and inspire us to be ambitious in developing cities. Urbanisation is a complex, cross-sectorial issue with enormous potential for alleviating global poverty and generating growth and prosperity. The new agenda and the current political momentum give us an unprecedented opportunity to make progress if we go about it the right way.

Norway has for many years been a strong advocate for bringing urbanisation higher up on the international agenda, and we have supported important actors in the field. We have been one of the main contributors to UN – Habitat.

Helping to meet the need for green, liveable and healthy cities has been a priority for Norway in developing the New Urban Agenda. Cities should have clean air, sufficient clean drinking water, clean streets, and sound waste and sanitation management.

They should be safe, resilient, innovative and productive. They should be accessible, and have adequate public space. We appreciate that the New Urban Agenda contains commitments and actions so that these goals may be reached.

Polluted air is one of the biggest killers globally, and Norway is proud to support the Breathe Life initiative to raise global awareness of this issue.

Norway's National Habitat report concluded that the development of a modern welfare state has contributed to higher living standards for the population. However, we have to meet the needs of an increasing elderly population, and climate change is causing more frequent floods, storms and landslides.

Against this backdrop, the Norwegian Government is developing a white paper on sustainable cities and strong districts. SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda will be important references for the white paper.

SDG 11, and indeed the whole 2030 Agenda, sets out the course for urbanisation toward 2030. At the same time, we believe that the New Urban Agenda can bring efforts to achieve urban-relevant SDGs to the next level.

We have a major task ahead of us. It will require participation from all relevant stakeholders including young people. It will require a spirit of partnership both within and outside the UN family.

Urbanization is inevitable and we must address it constructively. I am confident that if we are successful in implementing the New Urban Agenda in our cities, we will also be able to achieve sustainable development.

It is now that we have the momentum. Let us grasp this opportunity to make real progress!

Thank you.