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## WUF11 Highlights: Sunday, 26 June 2022

The World Urban Forum (WUF) assemblies of major stakeholder groups, which preceded the official opening of WUF11, were marked by strong calls to support cities in the face of crises. Throughout the day, speakers stressed the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, climate change and conflict impose on cities, while lauding their swift response and generosity to provide a safe haven for Ukrainian refugees. Many also called for better representation of local and regional governments in national and international decision-making to prevent future crises that primarily affect cities. The need to provide services emerged as a key issue in several assemblies as, in the absence of public services, women bear the brunt of providing care at the cost of income or education, pushing women further behind.

### Joint Opening of WUF11 Assemblies

Opening the session, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, welcomed participants to the first WUF in Central and Eastern Europe, noting its gender parity and high registration numbers. She listed five priorities: partnerships

to review New Urban Agenda (NUA) implementation; quick impact projects to develop monitoring mechanisms; approaches for promoting human rights and equity; policies to monitor global commitments; and sustainable urban and land use planning.

Małgorzata Jarosińska-Jedynak, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy of Poland, emphasized the importance of city-dweller participation to make good cities for all. She wished attendees a fruitful event of debate and “good conclusions.”

Emilia Sáiz, Secretary-General of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), stressed it is “time for peace and time for multilateralism.” Saying human rights, particularly the rights of women, are “in peril,” she identified key commitments: human rights; foregrounding the NUA; the right to the city; respecting the subsidiarity principle; and decentralization.

Violet Shivutse, Huairou Commission, underlined the importance of grassroots groups in shaping the outcomes of WUF11. These groups helped form the NUA and have experienced the localization of these policies. She noted grassroots groups are here to share these lessons and to collaboratively develop resolutions for a better way forward.



Onlookers watch the flag raising ceremony in front of the venue.



**Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Inés Sánchez de Madriaga, UN-Habitat, said women are powerful agents of change and that cities must better serve their needs including the tasks of care for the young, the elderly, and the daily life of families. She noted that the gender gap relating to these tasks has widened during the pandemic.

Ian Shapiro, CEO of REALL, said green, affordable homes help address challenges of climate change and inequality. Noting 70% of buildings that will exist in Africa and Asia in 2050 have not been built, he emphasized green housing as a “doorway to the SDG city, an inclusive and socially engaged city.”

### Assemblies

**Grassroots Assembly:** The Grassroots Assembly stressed action, highlighting communities putting SDGs into practice and women’s roles in pandemic resilience. Addressing the Assembly, Mohd Sharif identified grassroots as co-partners in the launch of a global action plan at World Cities Day. She urged them to be “drivers” in localizing SDGs and scaling transformation. She highlighted grassroots organizations as partners in putting urban poverty at the center of political agendas; making communities leaders in job creation, particularly for women and youth; and designing sustainable solutions.

Opening the Assembly, Shivutse said grassroots organizations have been seen as “beneficiaries” but have shown to be “change agents.” In the first panel on implementing the Sustainable



**Violet Shivutse**, Huairou Commission

Development Goals (SDGs), she noted women took on the increased burden of providing care when services failed during the pandemic. Chris Williams, UN-Habitat, said grassroots organizations can translate key issues, such as basic services and the localization of decision-making, into “concrete action.” Rose Molokoane, Slum Dwellers International (SDI), urged focusing transformation on informal settlements, not “cities that are already transformed.”

In panels on localizing the SDGs, building back better, and co-creation of systems, James Mwanjau, Civil Society Urban Development Platform, underscored principles of justice, equity, and dignity as foundations of urban decision-making. Veronica Katalushi, People’s Process on Housing and Poverty, emphasized inclusive partnerships: “Nothing for us without us.”

Breakout sessions generated core takeaways, including: creating meaningful, inclusive partnerships with clear responsibilities; localizing the SDGs with involvement of women and data collection for evidence-based advocacy; and building back with formalized partnerships and resources allocated to communities.

In a final panel on co-creation and multi-level policymaking, Lajana Manandhar, Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, noted the difficulty of attending WUF, suggesting that national or regional forums would be more accessible. Shivutse urged co-designing UN programmes in partnership with grassroots organizations. Moderator Sandy Schilen, Huairou Commission, emphasized grassroots organizations can be “proactive” monitors, using local knowledge to assess project viability.

**Children and Youth Assembly:** In a panel discussion on youth and the 2030 Agenda, speakers: called for more youth participation in decision-making; highlighted youth leadership in implementing the SDGs despite overlapping economic, political, and health crises; and stressed that connecting the SDGs with local cultures, traditions, and neighborhoods was essential for young people to understand and engage with the 2030 Agenda.

In a panel discussion on youth leadership in sustainable urbanization, representatives from youth organizations said determination, consistency, and positive mindsets are key to



Participants warm up before the start of the Children and Youth Assembly.





Leah Namugerwa, Fridays for Future

furthering youth participation. Reflecting on what leadership meant to them, they underlined: empowering others in their generation; effectively communicating initiatives; and devising inclusive organizational structures. They lamented the persistent tokenization of youth and discrimination against young women.

After breakout sessions on climate changemakers; gender and intersectionality; mental health and wellbeing; and safety, peace, and security, the Yücel Yılmaz, Mayor of Balıkesir, Turkey, announced the creation of a ‘One Stop Youth Centre’ in his city.

In the afternoon, a panel on safety, peace, and security identified counseling, consultations, community-building, and social media as tools to promote peace among youth in conflict-ridden areas. A panel on localizing the SDGs included a presentation by Hilmi Türkmen, Mayor of Uskudar, Turkey, on municipal initiatives to engage youth through sports and cultural centers. Speakers then cited youth-inclusive programming, youth councils, and digital technologies as means to get young people involved in SDG implementation. Lastly, a panel on the private sector and youth engagement called for policies to support youth-led startups and for companies to develop apprenticeship programmes.

In a closing segment, Leah Namugerwa, Fridays for Future, presented the “Global Youth DeclarACTION,” a list of demands by young people for sustainable urbanization. Mohd Sharif then signed an agreement with Fondation Botnar that launched the “Young Gamechangers Initiative,” a new partnership between the two institutions.

**Women’s Assembly:** Speakers shared experiences on: women’s heroic mobilization in the face of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and the war in Ukraine; gender mainstreaming in local policy development and security; and the importance of women as central stakeholders in the fight against and recovery from crises. Several stressed the importance of redistributing labor and wealth evenly, so women are not doing a majority of the work with a fraction of the resources. This is especially important with respect to women’s livelihoods in the informal economy and grassroots organizations working tirelessly to implement the NUA and the SDGs without the support or recognition they deserve.

Speakers recommended: improvements to public services and social protections to release women of their caregiving burdens, investing further in SDGs 7 through 15, asking UN member states to explicitly identify policies they are implementing to support the NUA, and advancing the collection and exchange of disaggregated data related to women’s participation across society to inform the necessary transformation.

Supported by many, the Mayor of Bogotá, Claudia López Hernández, spoke of the urgent need to acknowledge and relieve women globally from their collective burden as unpaid caregivers, as “no agenda can be achieved if we continue to send men off to work while restricting women to unpaid care.” Concluding the session, Mohd Sharif noted the need to overcome the four Cs of conflict, namely COVID-19, climate crisis, and capital, while other speakers called for women of all intersectional groups to make decisions and provide feedback relating to all aspects of society, including economics, politics, education, and urban planning and mobility, because cities made for all women are cities made for everyone.

**Business Assembly:** The session convened business leaders and government officials to identify opportunities for whole-of-sector approaches to accelerating the SDGs. The private sector’s ability to innovate and spur economic activity was emphasized as a necessity to achieve sustainability, while others identified a need for cooperative solutions that were not only economical but also appealed to businesses sense of social responsibility.

In a series of panels on businesses transforming cities for SDG impact, speakers noted the financial difficulties faced by municipalities as service providers. Declining revenues require governments to rethink how to finance infrastructure and services. These gaps provide beneficial opportunities for business and government to align objectives, as supporting governments’ core responsibilities sustains strong economies, which businesses rely on.

Speakers at a panel on the role of businesses across key industrial sectors, housing, real-estate, technology, mobility, and finance, recognized opportunities for collaboration, but noted that meaningful change required understanding the value proposition between both parties. Businesses and governments discussed the challenges with public-private partnership-based



Local musicians and dancers perform at the end of the Women’s Assembly.



models, and noted innovative approaches were needed for emerging challenges.

Government officials discussed the private sector's role in recovery and reconstruction in a panel focused on the situation in Ukraine, emphasizing efforts within Ukraine and in Poland to meet the needs of refugees.

A panel on lessons learned in urban response and recovery highlighted business opportunities in supporting cities in crises. However, interventions needed to prioritize local economies and respect local institutions and leadership. Panelists' consensus was that people need to be at the center of the recovery process, but improved frameworks, data, and resources are required for successful responses.

The final panel focused on attracting business sector investment and highlighted a need for cultivating an environment that prioritizes evidence-based policy, accountability, and transparency to make partnership attractive.

**World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments:** Facilitated by Emilia Sáiz, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Paul Currie, Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) Africa, mayors, international organizations, and networks shared innovations and policy directions on implementing the SDGs and the NUA in the context of current global crises.

Many called for strengthening local and regional governments' voice in national and international decision-making, insisting that those who bear the consequences must have a place at the decision-making table. Noting the multilateral



Emilia Sáiz, UCLG Secretary-General

system is failing to deliver the change we need, several proposed rebuilding it from the bottom up with some adding this is key to unlocking the NUA's potential to drive transformative change.

Stressing that women fill the gap when public and private actors fail to provide care, speakers proposed to decentralize care provision, reverse the privatization of care, and "decommodify" access to essential services. On cities and conflict, many lauded cities' role in protecting refugees and vulnerable populations, and encouraged city-to-city dialogues and rights-based approaches to providing safety and security. Speakers also called for adequate investments in public transportation as a fundamental service impacting equality, health, and the environment, with some calling for more national governments to include public transportation in their climate action plans.



A view of the room during the well-attended event.