



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**OPENING STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. WILLIAM  
SAMOEI RUTO, PhD, C.G.H. PRESIDENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF KENYA DURING THE SECOND  
SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS HABITAT  
ASSEMBLY**

**JUNE 5TH, 2023**

**UNITED NATIONS COMPLEX GIGIRI, NAIROBI**

- **Your Excellency Slumber Tsogwane, The Vice President of the Republic of Botswana,**
- **President of the UN-Habitat Assembly, Roman Meyer Falcon,**
- **Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi- Zainab Hawa Bangura,**
- **Executive Director, UN-HABITAT, Maimunah Mohd Sharif,**
- **Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,**
- **Mayors and Representatives of Local and Regional Governments,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

**Good Morning,**

1. I am delighted to have the honour of welcoming all of you to our warm and beautiful land, Kenya, and to our capital city, Nairobi, the globally famous Green City in the Sun. I hope you have already experienced our people's legendary hospitality, and that you will find some time to explore and enjoy the attractions which have earned us the name Magical Kenya. In case you do not already know, this is the only city worldwide, with a closed canopy forest to one side of the city centre, and a national wildlife park on the other.
2. Our ambition to be the home of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN Habitat, was inspired by a



deep commitment to pursue economic development together with sustainable urbanization in harmony with the preservation of our natural heritage. The international community's decision to locate this critical organization here, is therefore, out of recognition and emphatic endorsement of these commitments.

3. Our experience in balancing the imperatives of industrialization, sustainable urbanization and ecological responsibility as fundamental components of socioeconomic transformation has had its challenges and setbacks, but we are persuaded now, more than ever, that not only is it worthwhile and feasible, but it also enhances the efficiency, safety, beauty and liveability of our cities.
4. Even now, challenges exist with a variety, and on a scale that is unprecedented. The world is emerging from a devastating pandemic, whilst grappling with a relentless economic crisis driven by geopolitical tension, as well as the triple planetary crisis of pollution, loss of biodiversity and climate change. As a consequence, millions of people throughout the world have been adversely affected, including through threats to life and to livelihoods.
5. In addition to normal migration to urban areas, millions of people displaced by the recent social, economic and political upheavals, joined the poor, vulnerable underserved and marginal segments of our urban populations.
6. For better or worse, the world population has reached 8 billion people, 57% of whom live in urban areas. These numbers are expected to increase steadily in the coming years, but urban populations are projected to rise even faster. In the Global South, the rates will be even more pronounced, whilst in Africa, where the median age is 19,



urban populations will be very youthful, presenting a novel set of challenges and opportunities for national economic and urban planning, and development.

7. Urban centres have always held the most intense concentrations of both the best and the worst human possibilities: **wealth and poverty, well-being and suffering, dignity and misery**. As a result, they are also the theatres of the starkest inequalities in human opportunities and outcomes. The explosion in global populations as well as urbanisation, has immense implications for global production and consumption, with humanity poised firmly between trends and practices likely to overwhelm the planet's capacity to support life on one end, and clean, green, efficient and abundant sustainability on the other end.
8. Fundamentally, this gathering is one more opportunity for the global community to confer and reflect about the progress made in imagining new possibilities for the sustainable provision of opportunities and amenities to promote the flourishing of nearly 10 billion human beings, whilst enhancing the earth's capacity to support all life on it.
9. Urbanisation is an economy's ultimate test of efficiency, inclusivity, resilience and sustainability across all goods and services. Colossal demand for basic goods is always accompanied by tremendous pressure on energy resources and the environment. The connection between prosperity and ecological sustainability is always strong and direct. How we perform in this test, depends on the type and quality of decisions, choices, strategies and policies that we make and pursue, which in turn reflects the depth of our



deliberations and attention to the agenda in forums like this.

10. Our progress in affirming the fundamental right to decent housing is critical to the achievement of sustainable urbanization in terms of SDG number 11. Recognising this imperative and realizing that more than half of Kenya's population will live in urban areas by 2050, we have integrated universal housing as a critical pillar of the **national bottom-up economic transformation agenda**. Into the housing programme, we have further mainstreamed sustainable urban practices of green building, green spaces, adoption of low-carbon energy use, including low-carbon transport solutions, as well as urban agriculture and effective waste management.
11. In addition to these measures under our Urban Resilience Programme, we are restoring degraded landscapes and ecosystems through a robust programme, which includes increasing Kenya's tree cover from 12.13% currently, to 30% by planting 15 billion trees over the next 10 years.
12. Our capacity to coherently pursue these vital objectives has been significantly bolstered by the government's policy to mainstream sustainable development goals generally, and more pertinently, number 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and number 13 on climate action, into national development planning and implementation.
13. A key barrier to our aspirations for sustainable urbanization happens to be the very impediment to effective sustainable climate action in the Global South and Africa: **sufficient and affordable financing**. As a result, we are unable to effectively pursue all the opportunities in sustainable urbanization and leverage them to promote the broader



agenda of economic transformation, climate action and sustainable development.

14. Our discussions must therefore pay due attention to the fact that the prevalent unjustness of the international financial architecture, and the discriminatory practices inherent in development financing, are iniquitous insofar as they directly and indirectly exacerbate the vulnerability of the majority of humanity. It is time therefore to correct this systemic injustice to enable us effectively mobilise multilateralism to achieve global net-zero emissions, avert a climate catastrophe and achieve sustainable development goals.
15. Let us apply ourselves to these imperatives and ultimately take a stand for humanity by way of embracing an effective, sustainable, inclusive and just vision for the UN-Habitat.
16. I acknowledge with profound gratitude the progress UN Habitat has made in refining and championing the deployment of effective multilateralism in addressing the challenges of human settlement and promoting sustainable urbanisation. For this reason, I believe it is necessary to reiterate here the urgent need and immense importance of strengthening UN-Habitat and enhancing its capacity to support member states in advancing the agenda of sustainable urbanization and human settlement.
17. Evidently, the assignment is clear, and your work is well defined; I urge you to exploit this important opportunity to generate a robust framework for addressing the existential crises of our times.
18. On that note, I would like to announce to you that Kenya is privileged to have the honour of co-hosting the inaugural Africa Climate Summit, to be held from 4th to 6th of



September 2023, here in Nairobi. The summit will be Africa's opportunity to refine its position in preparation for COP 28, where we expect to articulate our agenda in a strong, clear, united and effective voice. I take this opportunity to welcome you back to Nairobi for the Summit.

**The Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly is now officially open.**

**Thank you very much. May God bless you.**

