

Statement of Local and Regional Governments at PrepCom2 for Habitat III

**Delivered by Jacqueline Moustache-Belle and Kadir Topbaş
on behalf of UCLG and the Global Taskforce
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Dear Secretary General of the Habitat III Conference, Dear Co-Chairs,
Delegates, Excellencies, Mayors,
Dear colleagues and friends,

Greetings

I am honored to address this distinguished audience on behalf of the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments and the Global Taskforce, representing all networks of Local and Regional Governments.

The Mayor of Istanbul, here today, has asked me to represent the group; and my intervention today is proof that for us, local governments gathered in international associations, the urban agenda is not only about big cities.

I also want to reassure you, by expressing that our delegation does not come here to make statements about our local political situations. We come here to find solutions, with you, for a sustainable future.

Many changes, both at local and global level, have occurred since Habitat II in 1996. For the past two decades, urbanization has had a great impact on the way our nations are organized and how the governance of our territories is arranged.

The growth of intermediary cities and the expansion of megacities and urban regions are unavoidable phenomena influencing all policies, from economic to social, from health to safety.

We feel, however, that despite the sheer scale of the opportunities and challenges, we are not addressing this sufficiently in the new global agenda as it is being negotiated.

Building on the achievements of the Habitat II Consensus

We are convinced that there will not be a sustainable future without sustainable, inclusive cities that are mindful of culture, equality and rural-urban linkages. The Habitat III Conference will be instrumental to achieving this cornerstone of our future agenda.

The Habitat II Consensus was extremely visionary in acknowledging local authorities as key partners to deliver the agenda. It further allowed for important steps forward in decentralization policies. It encouraged the development of new financial mechanisms and fostered investments in urban infrastructure.

This far-reaching vision has delivered progress, but has not reached its full potential.

Art. 104 of the Istanbul Declaration recognized the need for strong local governments. It literally states that the "sustainable development of human settlements in both rural and urban areas requires strong sub-national governmental institutions working in partnership with all interested parties".

We, stand before you today to reiterate our full commitment and support to ensure that the Istanbul spirit is recovered and that our cities can provide safe livelihoods for our communities.

Development and urbanization are closely linked. Not fully recognizing the significance of the transformative potential of urbanization would be a fundamental mistake that will shake the bases of the new agenda and will put its success in jeopardy.

As Art. 102 of the Habitat Agenda already stated: "The municipal level of government can be an effective partner in making human settlements viable, equitable and sustainable, since its level of administration is closest to the people. Governments must recognize the essential role of local authorities in providing services and empowering people".

These, distinguished delegates are your own words; your own agreements.

As per your own words, Habitat III will need to focus on local and urban actors. It needs to ensure it puts in motion mechanisms and means that can actually transform the agenda into actions. It needs to ensure capacity building, but also it needs to provide the bases for new policymaking.

Excellencies, we need to put implementers at the center of Habitat III. Managing a rapidly urbanizing world implies looking at the territory more than the city itself. It will necessitate a new governance concept and understanding cities as a collective common good; managed through innovative and inclusive governance mechanisms involving all stakeholders and spheres of government.

The new agenda will need to further promote decentralized cooperation, in order to strengthen city management. This will only be possible if the new agenda raises awareness on public space policies that go beyond tangible space, on strategic urban planning that builds human cities, and on long-term instruments to control land resources that understand land not as a mere commercial good but as a public one.

We need institutions that are able to deliver, based on real knowledge about the needs of all inhabitants, including those living in informality.

At the end of the day, it is about recognizing the social, economic, cultural and environmental potential of cities, with a multiplier effect across the nation, and beyond.

You have before you an organized constituency ready to contribute, and I would like to end by calling on Member States to provide the mechanisms to ensure the full participation of local authorities in the definition of the outcome document of Habitat III, by acknowledging the specific accreditation of Local Authorities through Associations of Local Authorities with consultative status to ECOSOC; applying rules 64 and 65 derived from the Istanbul Declaration to UN-Habitat's rules of procedure.

Allow me to paraphrase a famous sentence. Excellencies, a specific accreditation (without further rights), is a small step for you, but a huge step for the Habitat Agenda. The full involvement of local and regional authorities will enable the creation of an inclusive Habitat III Agenda and a sustainable future.

As you know, Local and Regional Governments are committed to organizing the second World Assembly of Local Authorities in 2016 and to actively supporting the Assembly of Partners.

We are ready to play our role. Let us ensure a solid process, an inclusive conference with high-level participation from Member States, and the participation of the full UN System.

Thank you.