

**National Statement of India by H.E. Mr. Rahul Chhabra,
High Commissioner & Permanent Representative of India to UN-Habitat
At First Session of UN-Habitat Assembly
(28 May 2019 – Nairobi)**

Ms. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in the first universal UN-Habitat Assembly within the new governance structure of UN-Habitat. The Assembly assumes significance as all member states are deliberating for the first time, after the dissolution of the Governing Council, of which India held the Presidency for the last two years. India stands committed to engage with the reformed UN-Habitat, to address the challenges of urbanization in a sustainable manner.

2. It is particularly satisfying to note that the international efforts towards inclusive, resilient, and sustainable human settlements have been strengthened over the last few years by the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements. Today, I thank the UN-Habitat for this opportunity to share our views on the timely theme of **“Innovation for Better Quality of Life in Cities and Communities”** with the relevant sub-theme of **“Accelerated Implementation of the New Urban Agenda towards the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.”** I am happy to share India’s vision for achieving the commitments agreed upon, for sustainable development of housing and urban development, and the human settlements at large.

3. India is among the largest urban systems in the world with a total urban population around 400 million. By 2030, when we complete work of the 2030 Development Agenda, nearly 600 million Indians, or 40% of our population, will reside in urban spaces. More importantly, the new urban infrastructure India builds for 2030, 70% of which still needs to be constructed, will have to be green and resilient. India has taken the leadership in defining the contours for facilitating planned urbanization, based on the principles of cooperative federalism to achieve social inclusion, economic growth and environmental sustainability for her people who constitute one sixth of humanity.

4. Urbanization in India has become an important determinant of rapid economic growth and poverty reduction. Urban areas generate over 2/3rd of the country's GDP and account for 90% of government revenues. We are, therefore, fully conscious of the challenges and opportunities offered by the ongoing urbanization. India affirms its commitment to the larger goals of urban equity and eradication of poverty; inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; productivity, competitiveness, diversification and innovation; and urban resilience. Urban development remains a shared responsibility of the different tiers of government and of the public and private sectors.

5. Urban areas in India face multi-pronged challenges. We remain confronted by a complex ecosystem of urban challenges through and in ensuring housing for all, technology-based solutions to enhance service delivery, better mobility and greener transport, smart governance, and in doing more with less. In order to address these new challenges, institutions and organizations need to introspect and may have to reorient in tune with emerging imperatives by adopting new strategies, approaches and technologies including remolding their roles. Reform and improvements are an intrinsic part of any organization and India recently merged two Ministries of 'Urban Development and Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation' to set up a new Ministry: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to stimulate integrated decision-making for productive urbanization.

6. India has embarked upon the journey of the most ambitious and comprehensive programme of urbanisation ever undertaken in the world, by initiating a range of policy interventions, under the leadership of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India's 'Housing for All' mission reflects our commitment for ensuring 12 million affordable homes by 2022 with a component of improved quality of life. This special intervention is appropriately integrated with financial, technology and governance components, along with people centric focus. The Mission for Rejuvenation and Transformation in 500 cities aims to achieve universal coverage of water supply and augmentation of sewerage network that has a direct link to provision of better services to 60% of our population.

7. India is successfully implementing the largest sanitation and hygiene program in the world - the Swachh Bharat Mission, with the objective of making India open defecation free and achieve scientific waste management by October 2nd 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Smart Cities Mission aims to realise India's promise to create inclusive and sustainable cities through innovation and data driven governance to enhance the quality of urban life in 100 Smart cities through a number of tools including National Urban Observatory and Urban Innovation Stack. This has made significant impact on reducing the carbon footprint, leveraging vertical expansion and reducing the overall burden on infrastructural resources by switching to cleaner substitutes.

8. For India, sustainable development is not a destination, but a dynamic process of adaptation, learning and action with greater synergies between the economy, society and the natural environment. The speed, scale and complexity of urbanization demands new solutions and innovative systems that can play an important role to ensure a faster transition towards a better future. In the context of India's commitment to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda, with focus on 'sustainable cities and human settlements for all', India has evolved an agenda that would enable the transformation of India. For effectively implementing its vision of the new urban agenda, India would rely on certain levers to make cities work towards greater productivity, inclusion, sustainability, and rural-urban linkages.

9. It would not be an understatement to say that India's urban agenda is one of the defining projects of our century. The broad aim is to create an ecosystem to encourage innovations for accelerated action and realigned the paradigm from 'provision of services' to integrated planning and holistic development, taking the idea of service provision various notches higher to improve operational efficiencies. The Nation's vision of transformation is reflected in the views of Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he said that "Cities are not just centres of economic growth; our cities have the capacity to mitigate poverty". For us the literal meaning of transformation is "Transform the Nation".

10. As a country we are striving towards replicating and sustaining these innovations on a large scale. We are making sustained efforts in strengthening capacities of our local governments

over the long term. We believe that innovation and collaboration are keys so that initial results become widely institutionalized, and fully embedded into the local system. As member of Executive Board of UN-Habitat, India would be happy to share its experiences and learn from the experiences of member states in improving the quality of life of millions of people in this ever-urbanizing globe.

11. Since its inception, India has supported UN-Habitat in its campaign and programmes towards contribution of sustainable development of human settlements across the world. India is happy to announce that UN-Habitat will continue to be engaged as one of the implementing Agencies for Indian Housing Project, Government of India's flagship bilateral assistance project with Sri Lanka with a fresh commitment of 2.6 million USD to UN-Habitat to support the program. India is committed to low cost housing project for returning refugees in Afghanistan. India also makes an annual financial contribution of USD 150,000 to the General Purpose Funds of UN-Habitat. In order to achieve accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the role of UN-Habitat would be crucial. For this, UN-Habitat needs to globally engage with all relevant stakeholders to identify innovative approaches and priorities, which can address integrated development of human settlements on a sustainable basis. India strongly feels that this is the time to strengthen UN-Habitat with regard to its roles of capacity building, advocacy and engagements on the ground. We reiterate our commitment to stand by all the efforts towards promoting sustainable development of human settlements for the welfare of citizens at large.
