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Written statement by UN-Habitat

Agenda Item 4: Building Strong Institutions to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts and For the Sustainable Management, Protection, and Restoration of Natural Resources

Climate change is one of the most pressing global issues of our time. Considering that 55 per cent of the world's population lives in urban areas and this share is projected to increase to 68 per cent by 2050, cities represent the main battleground for climate change action. Indeed, the most vulnerable regions are where urbanization will take place more rapidly. Of the 2.5 billion people expected to live in cities in the next three decades, 90 per cent of them will be in Asia and Africa. The critical role of cities, and their institutions, in climate change mitigation and adaptation is recognized in the Earth Summit and Agenda 21 (Local Agenda 21), the Paris Agreement (articles 7(2), 11(2)), the Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 11 and 13) and the New Urban Agenda (para 63). Specifically, the New Urban Agenda (NUA) calls for the integration of climate change adaptation and mitigation considerations and measures in urban and territorial development and planning processes (para 13(g)) which makes cities essential frontiers to implement robust action to combat climate change.

Urban actors are, in many instances, constitutionally and legislatively empowered with the autonomy and competencies to influence local level climate action, responses, and mitigation and adaptation strategies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. City-level institutions are better positioned to plan and implement policies and actions that address distinctive local climate-related challenges, as well as in the management and protection of natural resources. When local and sub-national governments design policies to reduce GHG in their territories, they are also setting an example for citizens and industrial enterprises to contribute to

sustainability. Fighting climate change at the local level entails that governments create local climate plans as well as initiating reforms to limit the use of fossil fuels, invest in renewable energies, implement a circular economy, and build safe settlements for peopleHowever, a wide range of issues such as limited climate financing, socio-economic and political tension and other emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, slows the progress and halt the momentum to combat climate change.

Additionally, urban extension has surpassed urban population growth globally and, due to that expansion, many cities have grown beyond the boundaries of their central municipality. Bridging geographic scales is increasingly difficult when the administrative boundaries do not match the functional integration of metropolitan regions. This unbridled expansion of cities is adversely affecting biodiversity and environmental sustainability in rural areas, particularly through permissive land-use planning or when urbanization is not well-planned and managed, with unsustainable patterns of land consumption. In Africa, the ability of local governments to control urban sprawl is often limited by lands being under the customary ownership and authority of traditional leaders, who are often custodians of natural resources.

The global metropolitan phenomena impacting cities of any size and territorial characteristics forces us to revisit and adapt urban governance and management frameworks. New approaches based on cooperation, solidarity and collective action between local and neighbouring governments are essential to cope with the most pressing challenges of sustainable development, such as climate change which does not recognize political nor jurisdictional boundaries. Multi-level institutional coordination, both horizontally and vertically, is key towards building stronger institutions to combat climate change and its impacts. For instance, In India, the ***National Action Plan on Climate Change, 2008*** promotes vertical coordination between the national government – through the Ministry of Environment and Forests – and the state governments as it requests all states to develop State Action Plans on Climate Change to ensure sub-national implementation of climate change commitments. In Colombia, the ***Political Constitution, 1991*** establishes the National Planning Council, a consultative body that is part of the National Planning System to discuss the National Development Plan among the national government and representatives of the territorial entities and of the economic, social, ecological, community, and cultural sectors (articles 340 and 341). Horizontal coordination should also be carried out at the local level. Line departments such as those dealing with housing, infrastructure, urban planning, environment and natural resources,

energy, and utilities within local governments need to work in a coordinated and coherent manner for effectiveness. Several countries have already reflected this need in their legislation. For example, the South Africa *Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act, 2013* provides that a municipal spatial development framework must "provide the spatial expression of the coordination, alignment and integration of sectoral policies of all municipal departments" (Section 21.m).

Another approach to improving clarity within multilevel governance for climate action is the development and implementation of a National Urban Policy (NUP). Chapter 9 of the 2020 World Cities Report showed that NUP's have returned to prominence as important guiding instruments to promote coherent and consistent urbanization within a country's boundaries. Both the 2030 Agenda and the NUA advocate for the importance of NUP's. While NUPs are an important first step, one of the key observations of the 2022 UN Secretary General's Quadrennial Report on the implementation of the NUA is that despite more countries having NUP's, this has not yet translated to impact on the ground. In much of Africa, urban plans are being used to attract the private sector both locally and internationally to invest in 'sustainability' projects that unfortunately do not substantially improve public infrastructure. This indicates that policy coherence through a NUP is a necessary but insufficient condition for effective multilevel governance. There are however also promising examples. A country level response is exemplified in Rwanda's 2015 National Urbanization Policy and echoed in the Urbanization and Rural Settlement Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2024 which promotes better management of urban sprawl into peri-urban and rural areas. The plans include key actions like improving transport services to connect urban and rural areas and mitigating environmental impacts at the edge of urban sprawl. Additionally, Rwanda has a national roadmap for green secondary cities that was developed and aligned with the aforementioned plans. Kenya is also a good example of how the law, i.e. *Climate Change Act, 2016* imposes duties upon the public sector to mainstream climate action into sectoral plans, strategies and programmes at national and county level - thereby building robust institutions to address climate change.

The role of non-State actors is also crucial when building strong frameworks to tackle environmental issues. Public administrations must recognize the importance of engaging with non-State actors by valuing their perspectives, research, and advocacy roles to foster long-term solutions since they can provide expertise and promote accountability. Policies enjoy stronger

recognition, support and buy-in from citizens when governments include various stakeholders in policy-making and decision-making processes.

Additionally, it is crucial to promote city-to-city partnerships and engagement to build and strengthen institutions at the city level to combat climate change. An example can be found in the city of Durban, South Africa that adopted ***Durban Adaptation Charter for Local Governments, 2011*** which encourages cities to promote multi-level and integrated climate governance through active partnerships, reducing climate vulnerability and foster sustainable climate mitigation and adaptation. In Zambia, the ***Public Private Partnerships Act, 2009*** has been utilized to mitigate the potential effects of reduced precipitation on the country's hydropower generation by enhancing solar power. The Zambian government partnered with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Bank, and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) through the Scaling Solar project to tender two utility-scale development projects where the winning bids from two renewable energy developers were the lowest prices by cents/kWh of any solar power that had been seen in Zambia prior to the project.

Finally, the role of finance in climate change action is widely acknowledged in global agendas. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda recognizes that "funding from all sources, including public and private, bilateral and multilateral, as well as alternative sources of finance, will need to be stepped up for investments in many areas including for low-carbon and climate resilient development". The NUA also calls for development and expansion of financial instruments related to climate change action. It specifically acknowledges that resources will be needed to improve transport and mobility infrastructure and systems (para 118) and calls for adequate investments in protective, accessible, and sustainable infrastructure (para 119). Similarly, finance appears prominently in the Paris Agreement whereby one of the key objectives is "making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low GHGs and climate-resilient development." Therefore, investing in public-private partnerships and private resource mobilization is central to support climate finance while encouraging inter-governmental transfers and vesting local governments with a revenue collection mandate. In addition, governments must offer incentives and disincentives to promote or discourage specific climate mitigation and adaptation activities, and the protection of natural resources as urban ecosystems.