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Statement

By

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At

ECOSOC Integration Segment on Sustainable Urbanization

**Interactive Panel:
Sustainable Urbanization in Africa**

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*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to be moderating this interactive panel within the first ever Integration Segment of ECOSOC and would like to thank the Bureau and DESA for allocating this session to concentrate on “**Sustainable Urbanization in Africa**”. The selection of sustainable urbanization as the theme of ECOSOC’s first Integration Segment is particularly timely, as cities of the world are increasingly the drivers of economic growth, social change, and environmental innovation.

Africa is currently experiencing the highest urban growth rate in the world, at 3.3 percent. As a result, UN-Habitat predicts that by 2020, half of the African population will live in urban areas and by 2050, 20 of the world’s 100 largest cities will be in Africa. Urban populations in Africa are expected to double in the next two decades and triple two decades after that.

In view of these stark trends, the sheer magnitude of urban growth on the continent and its impact on the three dimensions of sustainable development, sustainable urbanization lies at the heart of the continent's transformative development agenda, championed through the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the African Agenda 2063 to be adopted at the next AU Summit. The challenges that hinder sustainable urbanization in Africa are also those that are at the centre of the continent's development struggles, and the solutions to these challenges will constitute the core of Africa's development success.

For example, as urban populations grow, local governments face increasing difficulty in ensuring access to energy, healthcare, housing and education as well as to services such as water and sanitation. Poor urban infrastructure only exacerbates this challenge, hindering municipal transportation, waste removal, communication and electricity services. Industrialization is also closely linked to urbanization on the continent, as it is key for job

creation and economic opportunities for the millions of Africans living in cities.

The challenges of growing youth populations and rising youth unemployment are most strongly seen in African cities, where failure to properly address urban youth unemployment can lay the groundwork for poverty-induced crime, radicalization and conflict. In addition, African cities face growing climate change concerns, placing significant strain on the capacity and resources of cities, including with regard to climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and emergency response.

Inequality in African cities remains the second highest in the world, with an average Gini coefficient of about 0.58, well above the world average of 0.4. As a result, poor and vulnerable populations, particularly women and youth, are most strongly impacted by development challenges. Finally, every one of the challenges I have mentioned will require significant financial resources to address them, and African cities frequently face

revenue shortfalls as well as limited scope in the sources and modalities of available financing.

I should also stress here that while we are discussing sustainable urbanization in Africa, we must also address the urban-rural nexus in Africa and its implications for both urban and rural development on the continent. Migration between urban and rural populations will also be critical for managing the speed and magnitude of urban growth and ensuring its sustainability.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting sustainable urbanization on the continent, through close coordination with the African Union and UN-Habitat, as well as through the Organization's comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach. My Office is also committed to ensuring coherence and coordination of these efforts through the Interdepartmental Task Force on African Affairs, thus the UN can continue to deliver as one.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, adopted by AU Heads of State and Government, is a people-centred position that specifically recognizes the rising trend of urbanization and emphasizes the importance of prioritizing structural transformation for inclusive development. The six pillars of the Common African Position, at their essence, address the core challenges of sustainable urbanization, including structural economic transformation, people-centred development, environmental sustainability, and finance and partnerships.

Prioritizing sustainable urbanization, particularly in the global post-2015 development agenda and Africa's long-term Agenda 2063 transformative vision, will enable development challenges to be addressed in an integrated manner, empowering African cities to generate economic growth and improve quality of life while also protecting and preserving our environment.

We are fortunate, today, to have a distinguished panel of local government leaders who are on the front lines of sustainable urbanization in Africa and who have graciously agreed to share their insights and practical experiences. I really hope that our discussion, with your active participation, will not only raise awareness of the challenges facing African cities, but will also bring forward concrete and innovative solutions to make African cities the drivers of sustainable development on the continent.