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**Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Habitat III High-Level Round Table
Leave No One Behind: Urban Inclusion and Prosperity**

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mahatma Gandhi once said that “a nation’s greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members”.

When world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development last year, and made the commitment to ‘leave no one behind’, they placed upon all of us a special duty: a duty to ensure that in implementing the SDGs, that we prioritize the inclusion of those most in need.

It was a promise to ensure that by 2030, across our world, better living standards will reach and benefit the most disadvantaged.

It was a promise that by 2030, whether you grow up on a remote island in the Pacific, a favela in Rio, a slum in Mumbai, or an immigrant neighborhood in Paris, that being born ‘free and equal in dignity and rights’ would be a universally lived experience.

The answers lie in the cities. For us to achieve a world in which extreme poverty has been eliminated, children have access to quality education, people live in peaceful and inclusive societies, inequality is reduced, women and girls are empowered, and climate change effectively combatted, it is in the cities and in the policies that shape them, that we will find our salvation.

As you well know, by 2030, around 60 percent of the world’s population is expected to live in urban areas, with this figure trending to around 70 percent by 2050.

Without timely urban policy intervention, we risk exacerbating poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, rather than redressing these elements.

The New Urban Agenda provides an important framework for building cities that are safe, resilient, and sustainable – where urban infrastructure, social protections, and public services are accessible to all.

To achieve this vision, it is time for all stakeholders to come together – in global settings like this, and at local levels, to discuss experiences, share innovations, create opportunities for partnership, and to ensure coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness of policies on the ground.

Leaders in national and local governments, civil society, and business need to be working together, not forgetting to prioritize the most vulnerable in their decision-making.

Long-term policy and political commitments are needed to achieve the necessary institutional, policy, and financing reforms.

And on the subject of urban inclusion, meaningful participation of the people most affected by policy decisions must be integral to the transformational process.

We must all do what we can to ensure that the implementation process and gains of the SDGs are owned by all, as we build pathways towards greater resilience for people and planet.

As President of the UN General Assembly, I am committed to driving the sustainable development goals through a universal push for meaningful progress in each of the 17 SDGs by the end of next September.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building an inclusive, sustainable, and safe world for all is a formidable task, but the process of witnessing a steady slide in the opposite direction is far more daunting. It is for this reason that the achievement of all 17 SDGs is so vital to a sustainable way of life for humanity on planet Earth – not just for the currently marginalized but for all of us and those that come after us.

Thank you.