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Talking points

by

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at the

Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

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Palais des Nations, Tempus 2

Excellencies,

Dear Ministers and Ambassadors,

Dear Mayors,

Dear colleagues and friends,

I am extremely proud to welcome you at this Ministerial Meeting held under the title “Affordable, adequate, and resilient housing in liveable cities, including cities which face extreme weather conditions”.

The very high level of participation from government representatives and partners demonstrates the importance of the topic addressed:

- Over 300 participants registered to participate in this meeting
- Many more are watching this Ministerial Meeting over the UN web TV
- 36 Ministers, Vice-Ministers and State Secretaries will present during this meeting their views on the state of housing in their countries and cities
- Representatives of 45 countries – member States and 6 country-observers will attend this meeting in person and online
- Representatives of housing cooperatives, homeowner associations, experts, civil society representatives have also taken initiative to participate in this meeting.

It is my sincerest hope that a strong political commitment to address the challenges of access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing will result from this meeting.

In 2015, the 56 UNECE member States endorsed in Geneva an important document, the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing, which continues to guide the work of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management.

Based on the principles of the Charter, an important study, “#Housing2030: Effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region”, is launched today by UNECE, UN-Habitat and Housing Europe. This study is the outcome of the joint work of over 100 experts and focuses on solutions to the housing affordability crisis in the UNECE region, highlighting existing policy instruments and good practices. The #Housing2030 addresses four topics: (1) Housing governance and regulation; (2) Access to finance

and funding; (3) Access and availability of land for housing construction; and (4) Climate-neutral housing construction and renovation. The study covers numerous challenges to housing affordability throughout the UNECE region, but also many policy mechanisms and tools already available to address them.

Together with the study, an interactive web portal at www.housing2030.org is launched and contains best practices, online trainings and publications. The study and dissemination of its content through the online web portal and our regular work on policy advice and technical assistance will support representatives of both national and local governments and stakeholders in their important work to promote affordable and decent housing for all.

I would like to use this opportunity to underline the importance of the cooperation with other organizations in the #Housing2030 Initiative and express special thanks to Housing Europe and UN-Habitat for this valuable partnership. I would also like to thank lead experts and co-chairs of the study for their hard work and generously sharing their expertise.

Tomorrow the document entitled “Place and Life in the ECE – A Regional Action Plan 2030” is expected to be endorsed by the meeting. This is just the start of this journey: we will make sure that after the Ministerial Meeting we will meet again to discuss how we can work together to implement the Plan.

The Regional Action Plan builds on key principles of the global documents, such as the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing. It also reflects the main outcomes and recommendations of the #Housing2030 study. I believe it is a powerful document which provides us with clear priorities to make housing in the UNECE region more affordable, decent and accessible for all.

The Regional Action Plan developed with the support of the Glasgow Urban Lab, a UNECE Centre of Excellence which operates as a partnership between The Glasgow School of Art and Glasgow City Council for capacity building on sustainable urban development.

Further, the Regional Action Plan was illustrated by the international award-winning architect, Lord Foster, President of the Norman Foster Foundation. His sketches present a vision of city planning that incorporate concepts of sustainable urban development and innovation such as energy efficient housing, sensitivity to local culture and values, the upgrading of informal settlements and access to green areas. The sketches moreover provide a powerful visualisation to the key policy objectives and targets of the Action Plan. The sketches will be added to the Action Plan after it is endorsed by the Ministers and published. I am very pleased that the Norman Foster Foundation cooperates with UNECE as a Centre of Excellence on the promotion of sustainable housing and cities.

Allow me to thank both UNECE Centres of Excellence at the Glasgow School of Arts and at the Norman Foster Foundation for the important support to the preparation of this document.

I seize this opportunity to invite you to the opening of the exhibition after the launch of the #Housing2030 study, where you can have a closer glimpse to the beautiful sketches by Architect Foster.

Last but not the least, in the run up to this Ministerial Meeting, in order to learn more about the countries' challenges and priorities for the future, UNECE conducted a survey on "Improving housing affordability in the UNECE Region". I would like to take this opportunity to highlight several key outcomes of the survey as a basis for our discussion at this Ministerial Meeting. The aim of the survey was to explore the views of UNECE member State countries on their key challenges, policies and needs in relation to housing affordability and use this information to better inform the activities of UNECE in this field.

The survey outcomes demonstrated that one of the most widespread concerns is the lack of financial provisions to support housing affordability as. Countries report increasing gaps between income and housing costs as well as social and spatial inequalities in access to affordable housing. This represents a challenge not only for low-income and vulnerable groups, but also increasingly for middle-class households in the context of shrinking public sector resources and capacity to support affordable

housing supply and lack of political will to address key challenges to housing affordability.

The survey revealed great variety between countries in regard to the role of the state in supporting social and affordable housing, often depending on resources, capacities and political will. The results of the survey therefore emphasize the importance of continuing UNECE activities on international coordination, knowledge exchange and capacity building around affordable housing.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments implemented emergency policies aimed at mitigating the risks of inadequate housing conditions, eviction, or foreclosure. Some governments implemented longer-term recovery plans. These are areas where there is also a need for stronger cooperation and knowledge exchange.

Overall, the survey outcomes call for a more active involvement of UNECE in supporting its member States in their efforts to address housing affordability, organize more effective exchange of best practices and knowledge among the countries and cities to improve housing governance, housing finance and increase political attention to the importance of affordable housing across the region.

All the above certainly demonstrates the importance of implementing the proposed UNECE Regional Action Plan 2030 – we trust you, the Ministers and heads of the delegations, will endorse it and immediately start working at its implementation! I wish this Ministerial Meeting success!