High Level Communique for Sustainable Urban Development in Asia-Pacific

The Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-8)

I. Introduction

a. The Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-8) was convened from 23-25 October 2023 in Suwon, Republic of Korea. The forum was co-organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Suwon City in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the Republic of Korea, under the theme of “Reforging post pandemic pathways to sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific.” APUF-8 built on the outcomes of the seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-7) held from 15-17 October 2019 in Penang, Malaysia, co-organized by ESCAP and the Ministry of Local Government Development and Urbanice Malaysia.

b. Ministers and senior officials released a high-level communique which reflects a voluntary regional consensus on sustainable urban development in Asia-Pacific during the APUF-8 High Level Session held on 23 October 2023. The communique seeks to promote Asian and Pacific cities as engines of progress while respecting the limits of our planet and promoting the well-being of all residents. It is a statement for the region to localize the Sustainable Development Goals and reinforce the New Urban Agenda for a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous urban future.

c. In an era characterized by unprecedented urbanization and multiple interlinked crises, countries in the Asia-Pacific region find themselves at a crucial crossroads. This communique marks a significant milestone in the regional collaborative efforts of countries, as representatives gather at APUF-8 to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities presented by the rapid urban growth that defines our era.
II. Priority Actions

a. We support the promotion of integrated urban and territorial planning that accommodates population growth, infrastructure expansion, economic growth, sustainable food systems and natural resource conservation. Through effective and inclusive spatial planning, mixed land-use, and participatory processes, we aspire to create vibrant, equitable, green and connected urban spaces that optimize resources and minimize environmental impacts.

b. We seek to foster multilevel climate governance, enhancing coordination and cooperation between local, subnational, and national authorities on climate action. Together, we support the implementation of climate adaptation measures, such as green and blue ecosystem-based adaptation solutions, flood-resistant design and infrastructure, and energy-efficient technologies, ensuring our cities are prepared for the changing climate and contribute actively to global emission reduction targets.

c. We prioritize inclusive urban policies to address the needs of women, youth, persons with disabilities as well as all marginalized and vulnerable communities. We will scale up investment in affordable housing, urban regeneration, accessible public transportation and equitable access to basic services, ensuring that every citizen can enjoy the benefits of urban life, irrespective of their status or socio-economic background.

d. We support the creation of an enabling environment that attracts public and private investments for urban infrastructure investments to catalyse the SDG stimulus at the local level. Through innovative financing mechanisms, public-private-people partnerships and regional cooperation, we aim to secure the necessary resources for transformative urban development that empowers local economies and fosters long-term prosperity.

e. We recognize the potential of technology in driving innovation to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and economic growth, especially across sectors such as transportation, governance and public services. We aim to facilitate the deployment of inclusive urban digital solutions, data-driven decision-making and digital platforms that empower women and all citizens to actively engage in shaping their urban environments, enable efficient resource management and encourage efficient urban management practices.
III. Partnerships for collaborative action

a. We support collaborative action to address the complex challenges posed by unplanned urbanization. We have outlined pivotal policies, investments and modalities for effective collaboration, followed by key recommendations for follow-up and review mechanisms that will ensure the continued success of sustainable urban development efforts.

b. We encourage policies at all levels to foster synergies and align urban policy frameworks for national governments, regional bodies, local authorities and all stakeholders to collectively harness resources and expertise to implement comprehensive strategies and joint action that promote inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban growth.

c. We seek collaborative partnerships across governments, businesses, civil society and local communities to yield innovative solutions, efficient resource allocation and equitable urban development outcomes. Through shared responsibilities and complementary strengths, these partnerships will facilitate the implementation of sustainable urban development investments, thus advancing the broader goals of the Asia-Pacific nations.

d. We encourage an environment of dialogue and collaboration so that national and local governments in partnership with local communities can harness collective wisdom, promote ownership, and generate greater awareness and commitment towards sustainable urban development objectives.

e. Establishing robust mechanisms for north-south, south-south, triangular and city-to-city cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region will enable peer-learning, the replication of successful models and the identification of context-specific solutions. By fostering mutual support and knowledge exchange, regional cooperation will amplify the impact of sustainable urban development initiatives.

IV. Recommendations for Follow-up and Review

a. To sustain momentum and encourage cross-learning, we encourage multistakeholder urban forums and dialogues to be organized in a coordinated fashion at global, regional, national, and local levels. Platforms, such as the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, facilitate the exchange
of experiences, highlight emerging challenges and promote the sharing of evidence-based practices. Through open dialogue, stakeholders can collectively shape urban policies, fine-tune strategies and strengthen commitments towards sustainable urban development.

b. We encourage every actor to proactively create and engage in urban development networks or coalitions within their respective regions, such as the Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanization launched at APUF-7 in 2019. These purpose-driven alliances will play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable urban development by streamlining coordination, facilitating the exchange of resources and collectively executing strategic projects. Through the cultivation of a profound collective accountability, these regional networks ignite comprehensive urban strategies uniquely tailored to the distinctive socio-economic landscape of the Asia-Pacific region.

c. Adequate and sustainable financing mechanisms are imperative for realizing urban development goals. National governments and cities should jointly explore innovative funding sources, such as international and domestic climate finance sources, public-private-people partnerships, sustainability bonds and impact investment, to secure the necessary resources. By leveraging both public and private capital, cities can undertake transformative projects that improve urban services and adequacy of housing, enhance liveability, and advance social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

V. Way Forward

a. The path to sustainable urban development in the Asia-Pacific region hinges on the establishment of collaborative partnerships that transcend boundaries and unite diverse stakeholders. The proposed recommendations for follow-up and review mechanisms will support that progress is sustained, fortified and propelled toward a future where urbanization is synonymous with sustainability and prosperity.

b. In this spirit of collaboration, we welcome the dialogue that lies ahead. Through collective determination and unwavering dedication, we endeavor to pave the way for a brighter, more sustainable urban reality in the Asia-Pacific region.

Suwon, Republic of Korea
23 October 2023