



Statement of Lebanon

by

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**at the
General Debate**

**of the
United Nations Conference on Housing
and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)**

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Check Against Delivery

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Mr. Chairman,

Allow me at the outset to commend the Government and people of Ecuador for their hospitality and generosity, and for the magnanimous effort and energy they have deployed to ensure the success of this Conference, despite the recent challenges that faced the country, particularly as a result of the earthquake that hit earlier this year, with its significant human and material consequences.

Our meeting in Quito this week for the Habitat III Conference comes at the backdrop of 15 momentous months on the global sustainable development calendar that saw the adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

The complementarities and inter-linkages among these outcome documents and the New Urban Agenda are obvious; hence the need for an integrated approach at the global, regional, national and local levels that ensures the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, aims to maintain peace and stability and strives to build resilience in situations of protracted humanitarian crises.

As the main engines of economic growth during the 21st century, our cities and towns will be at the forefront of this effort, as the majority of our countries' populations move to inhabit urban centers seeking the opportunities they offer in the form of decent jobs, quality services, and a diverse and inclusive cultural life. Such a major demographic shift will put extra pressures on urban infrastructure, particularly in developing countries. All sectors will feel the strain of such an influx of people, including housing, transport, healthcare, education, electricity, water supply and sanitation.

To tackle this growing challenge, national governments and local authorities will need to set up enabling policy frameworks, and ensure their effective implementation. In developing countries, this will naturally require enhanced domestic resource mobilization, better governance and the engagement of the private sector, civil society and academic community. But this will also require adequate international financing, capacity building and technology facilitation. The role of the UN System, particularly that of UN Habitat, will be crucial in the implementation and follow up phase, through the provision of policy advice, the mobilization of resources, and the facilitation of partnerships.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, Lebanon is a highly urbanized country with more than 87% of its population living in urban areas, and 64% living in large urban agglomerations. In

country with a surface area of just 10452 km², urbanized areas went from 465 km² in 1994 to 741 km² in 2005, and are expected to reach 884 km² in 2030. As in other developing countries, in Lebanon, fast urbanization has brought its familiar set of challenges, in addition to those related to Lebanon's particular geopolitical and socio-economic context.

Many of these unique challenges stem from major demographic shifts that occurred in Lebanon as a result of the 1975-1991 internal civil conflict and the Israeli invasions in 1978 and 1982, which led to multiple waves of internal displacement and the sprawling of informal neighborhoods around major cities, particularly the capital Beirut.

Under-development and scarce government investment in different parts of the country, particularly the North and the East, continue to contribute to this demographic shift today, more on economic rather than security grounds. Other urban challenges that face Lebanon today are related to the rapid urbanization and the prominence of the real estate sector during the reconstruction period after 1992, which was mostly dominated by high-end developments, placing increased pressure on the housing sector's ability to address the needs of the poorer sections of society, and further exacerbating the situation in informal neighborhoods around major cities.

The Government has intensified its efforts to address these multiple and complex challenges by attempting to address the gaps in existing urban legislation, adopting an Environment Code in 2002, and by promoting regional strategic urban plans through Unions of Municipalities, some of which are already pooling their resources to address local development projects.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

The mass influx of more than 1.1 million refugees from Syria into Lebanon since 2011 has compounded and multiplied the challenges facing the country as a whole, and its underdeveloped regions, especially the North and East, which have borne the biggest brunt of the refugee impact. The influx has overstretched Lebanon's originally limited resources and services, undermined security, aggravated unemployment levels, and seriously affected the economic activity and investment climate around the country. It has also increased the demographic pressure on the poorer neighborhoods of Greater Beirut and the Palestinian camps, where many of the refugees are currently residing due to those areas' relatively lower rental rates.

The humanitarian response to the crisis has been generous, but unfortunately, not sufficient. Humanitarian funding has fallen way short of the resources needed and identified by the United Nations agencies. Today, tackling humanitarian crises through the narrow channel of humanitarian assistance has proven to be

insufficient; hence, the need to tap on the wider purse of development funding, and our call on donors, international financial institutions and UN agencies to provide host countries of refugees, including middle income countries, with adequate development financing on concessional terms, that would meet their needs, strengthen their resilience and alleviate the impact of such protracted crises.

I thank you for your attention.