



Speaking points for

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*for the welcome remarks at the Vienna Conference on Sustainable
Housing*

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**Vienna International Center, Wagramer Str. 5 | 1220 Vienna,
Conference Room C-C4**

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to welcome you on behalf of the UNECE and open this international conference on sustainable housing.

This Conference is organised by the City of Vienna and the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, including its Real Estate Market Advisory Group (REM) and with the support of Urban Innovation in Vienna (UIV) and Partners for Urbanism and Sustainable Housing (PUSH).

I would also like to thank

- the City of Vienna for the financial support to the organisation of this important event;
- our partners in Vienna, Urban Innovation in Vienna and Partners for Urbanism and Sustainable Housing, who organized this excellent conference and its side events, such as this morning very interesting field trip to Aspern Seestadt;
- all the speakers, country representatives, and delegates here today who so generously agreed to share their valuable experience with us at this conference.

I would like to express my special thanks to Mr. Wolfgang Förster, Coordinator IBA Wien International Building Exhibition, and Chair of the UNECE Expert Group for the development of the Geneva UN Charter for Sustainable Housing. The expert group under the leadership of Mr. Förster worked from 2011 to 2014 and through difficult intergovernmental negotiations has elaborated the text of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing. The Charter was further endorsed by the Committee in 2004 and by the UNECE in 2015.

The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing is based on the principles of environmental protection, economic effectiveness, social inclusion, participation, and cultural adequacy. The Charter is a demonstration of the commitment of ECE member States to improve the overall access to adequate, affordable, good quality, healthy and secure housing and utility services, with particular attention to young people and vulnerable groups, and provides a framework for building smarter and more sustainable cities.

Implementation of the Charter has started through the establishment Geneva UN Charter Centres of Excellence in Glasgow, UK; Tallinn, Estonia; and Tirana, Albania; and through a series of national and regional events and capacity building activities. The Charter Centres are bringing the implementation of the Charter principles to the national and local level.

To support the implementation of the Charter, UNECE also supports:

- **national reviews of housing, urban development and land management policies** and practices through the preparation of Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management;
- **Studies on adequate, affordable and sustainable housing**, such as reports on Social Housing in the ECE region, Housing for Migrants, Framework Guidelines on Real Estate Markets and other; we also organise multiple capacity building events on affordable housing, especially in countries with economies in transition;
- the preparation of **National Action Plans on Sustainable Housing, Urban Development and Land Management** based on the Country Profiles' recommendations;
- reviews at city level through the development of **smart sustainable city profile** which leverage on the Key Performance Indicators for Smart Sustainable Cities elaborated by UNECE, ITU and other 14 UN bodies and relevant stakeholders; and
- the promotion of **energy efficiency standards in buildings through a Joint Task Force**, peer learning and capacity-building jointly with partners in government, the private sector and academia.

However, there is a need in a stronger push for more effective implementation of the Charter in the UNECE Region at the national and local level; specifically, there is a need in developing an

awareness campaign about the Charter, especially at local level; conducting studies with analysis of the implementation; organisation of more focused capacity building activities; and establishment of a system of regular reporting on the Charter implementation.

There is strong evidence of the importance of this work on implementation of the Geneva UN Charter.

- Nowadays, the housing sector is affected by economic, environmental and societal issues in the UNECE region. For example, **migration and an ageing population** are changing the population structure in the region. From 2010 to 2015, the number of refugees received in the UNECE region has risen from 2 to 4.8 million in the same period. Further, a rapid urban expansion and the consequent people's flow from rural areas into cities and the ageing pose huge pressure on the housing sector due to the constant demand of housing, including the housing tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups, which in many cases cannot be met in the short-term.
- **Cities consume most of the energy** available and produce the greatest amount of carbon emissions. In the UNECE region, buildings alone account for approximately 40 per cent of energy consumption and 40 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Unsustainable urban development creates even greater inequalities and marginalizes the most vulnerable populations.

Urbanization is, indeed, one of the biggest challenges in our region. It is estimated that globally in a mere 30 years the population living in cities has grown to 6 billion. We have very little time to make transformative changes that will ensure that we can confront this growth and provide the services our people need in a sustainable manner. As UN Deputy Secretary General Amina J. Mohammed stressed when speaking about the New Urban Agenda, “it is clear that it is in cities where the battle for sustainability will be won or lost.”

We are looking forward for strengthening cooperation with national and local authorities and all relevant stakeholders in implementation of the Charter. The UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management is a unique platform for the governments and stakeholders with whom it is working together since 1947, for the last 70 years, to address these shared housing and urban development challenges.

We are looking forward for the cooperation on the implementation of the Charter in close coordination with the implementation of the the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda and other relevant global and regional commitments through integrated approach and with widest possible participation of all relevant stakeholders at the local, national and regional level.

I look forward to our continued cooperation, and wish you a fruitful and successful meeting. Thank you.