Harnessing the power of digital revolution for
urban sustainability and prosperity

——14th Global Forum on Human Settlements productively convened at

UN Conference Center in Addis Ababa

(Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 6) As one of the most important global congresses on urban agenda, sustainable cities and human settlements, as well as an observance of Urban October, GFHS 2019 was successfully held on 5-6 September at UN Conference Center in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Dr. Eng. Seleshi Bekele, Minister of Water, Irrigation and Energy of Ethiopia, Mr. Raila Odinga, former Prime Minister of Kenya, High Representative for Infrastructure Development at the African Union Commission, and Mr. Oliver Chinganya, Director, African Center for Statistics and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) attended and addressed the forum. The outcome document – Addis Ababa Declaration was adopted at the closing session, thus providing inputs to the World Urban Campaign activities and World Urban Forum 2020 in Abu Dhabi in February 2020.

Themed as "Sustainable Development of Cities and Human Settlements in the Digital Era", GFHS 2019 was designed to provide a valuable platform for high-level dialogue among participating stakeholders from around the world and to look for leapfrogging opportunities that digital revolution is bringing for making cities greener, smarter and more sustainable. It also commits to support Africa in developing digital economy, to drive progress towards sustainable urbanization, and to enhance pragmatic cooperation in the context of the "Belt and Road Initiative".

Mr. Raila Odinga pointed out in his special remarks that "the hosting of this forum is very important. Africa is facing tremendous opportunities for development. We

need to strive for infrastructure development, including transportation, energy, housing, digital facilities, and turn resources into product exports. Africa is a sleeping lion, and it is time to wake up this lion."

Mr. Oliver Chinganya emphasized that "when discussing smart cities and digital citizenry, it is equally important to remember that perhaps only a third of Africans are on the internets and half own a mobile phone. The digital infrastructure is far from the world's best in terms of speed, volume and reliability. Early estimates suggested that Africa needs about $5 billion a year for ICT infrastructure"

GFHS Secretary General Mr. Lu Haifeng shared that "carbon-based green city" and "silicon-based smart city" are the two major urban development trends. Combining the two will help sustain and green the economy while making cities and communities smart and sustainable.

The forum was co-organized by Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Urban Campaign (WUC), in cooperation with Universal Peace Federation (UPF), Global One Belt One Road

Association (GOBA), Global Blockchain Alliance (GBA), World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (WANGO), Belt and Road African Studies Alliance, Silk Sustainable Development Institution and concerned Ethiopian government agency.

Approximately 500 major stakeholders from more than 50 countries joined many ministers, mayors, well-known experts, business and social leaders in working out innovative solutions and fostering partnerships. Some of the distinguished guests include Mr. Mesfin Assefa, State Minister, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Ethiopia; Ms. Jenipher Kacha Namuyangu, Minister of State for Local Government, Uganda; Mr. Roi Chiti, Project Leader, World Urban Campaign; Prof. Oudom Wang, Chairman of Global One Belt One Road Association; Dr. Taj Hamad, Vice Chairman of Global Forum on Human Settlements; Mr. Vicente Guallart, Founder, Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia; Former Chief Architect of Barcelona City Council; Mr. Serge Salat, Member of International Resource Panel, Leading Expert of International Green Model City Standards 3.0, among others. Ten delegates representing cities, businesses, academia and civil society announced commitments to support the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which will scale up the local efforts towards achieving the SDGs.

GFHS 2019 happened very timely in addressing the key issues including: smart sustainable cities and communities; digital technology, innovation, and sustainability in Africa; the World Urban Campaign: connecting global sustainability agendas and private sector local actions; smart green building, renewable energy and urban resilience; International Green Model City Initiative: greener, smarter future cities; financing for sustainable urban infrastructure; blockchain technology and smart city governance; family values and happiness in cities, among others. These in-depth discussions help to capture opportunities in the digital age, support smart city development and the use of digital technologies to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

The 2019 Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements Awards Ceremony (SCAHSA) once again became a highlight of the event. 26 organizations and individuals from around the world were commended, such as City of Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain; Wuhan Changjiang New Town Starting Area Urban Design; Mara Naboisho Conservancy, Masai Mara; Zoma Museum, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Greenway planning and design: Growing an Urban Mosaic in Saint Louis; Li Zhenguo, Founder and CEO of LONGi Green Energy Technology; well-known architect Mick Pearce; Guiyang•Sunac City; Social housing project from Johannesburg. The complete list of award winners can be accessed by clicking the link: http://www.gfhsforum.org/award. In the meantime, the International Green Model City Initiative welcomed new partners through presenting commemorative plaque to Wuhan Changjiang New Town Administration Committee, China; City of Quezon, the Philippines; City of Johannesburg, South Africa; City of Accra, Ghana; Forest City, Malaysia; Red Star Macalline Group, China, and others.

The forum finally adopted the outcome document – Addis Ababa Declaration which emphasizes: the development of digital technology should adopt a people-oriented approach and put safety as the top priority; the urban master plan should integrate green city and smart city development, advocating compact and polycentric urban form, promoting a mixed-use and more livable community, ensuring environmental efficiency by encouraging the reuse and recycle of different resources, as well as improving productivity and prosperity; the foundation of a smart city is to integrate data, enable sharing of information, strengthen connectivity and realize in-depth development of digital resources; using applicable and affordable digital technologies in urban planning, construction and management is vital in ensuring that the benefits of these technologies are shared by all; it is essential to invest in expanding the people's digital capacity through education, cultivating the spirit of innovation, and promoting the development of green economy; and the design and construction of communities and buildings should be fully adapted to the characteristics of the digital age, that is "innovative, convenient, efficient, green and inclusive".

By the News and Information Department, GFHS

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https://www.uneca.org/stories/forum-sustainable-urbanization-kicks-addis-ababa
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