



**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION
COMMISSION, H.E. MAHMOUD ALI YOUSOUF**

AT

THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2nd AFRICA URBAN FORUM

9 APRIL 2026

NAIROBI – KENYA

- **Your Excellency Dr. William Samoei Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya and Host of the Second Africa Urban Forum,**
- **Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government present here**
- **Honourable Ministers, Heads of delegations**
- **Hon. Musalia Mudavadi, Prime Cabinet Secretary & Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, Republic of Kenya**
- **Hon. Alice Wahome, EGH, Cabinet Secretary for Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development, Republic of Kenya**
- **Mr. Anar Guliyev, Chairperson, State Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan & National Coordinator for the WUF 13.**
- **Ms. Anaclaudia Marinheiro Centeno Rossbach, Executive Director of UN- Habitat,**
- **Hon Sakaja, Governor, Nairobi City County, Kenya**
- **Distinguished Mayors and Leaders of Local and Regional Governments,**
- **Representatives of International Development Partners and the Private Sector,**
- **Members of Academia and Civil Society,**
- **Members of the Press,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour and privilege to join you today and address this august assembly on the occasion of the opening session of the Second Africa Urban Forum here in Nairobi, dedicated to reflecting on the delivery of ***Adequate Housing for All as the continent advances socio-economic and environmental transformation towards the Realisation of Agenda 2063.***

Allow me to express the sincere appreciation of the African Union Commission to His Excellency President William Samoei Ruto, the Government and the people of the Republic of Kenya, for hosting this important continental gathering and for their exemplary leadership in advancing Africa's urban development and housing agenda.

As we gather here to affirm the value of partnership and cooperation and finding common solutions to shared problems, I wish to commend our longstanding partnership with the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), for their continued support in convening this continental gathering.

Your Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Africa Urban Forum (AUF), as a brainchild of the African Union Commission, was established during the Fourth Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development and Decentralization (AU-STC.No.8) held in Cairo, Egypt in August 2022. The Forum was established in response to a growing recognition of Africa's rapid urbanisation; its opportunities and challenges, and the need for a continental platform to promote an inclusive and holistic approach to unlocking its full potential. The AUF has evolved from its inaugural session held in Addis Ababa in 2024, to become a vital multi-stakeholder platform for discussing key urban issues, linking the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

The value of the Forum lies in its ability to provide a unique platform for political leadership, policy dialogue, and partnership, shaping Africa's urban future while strengthening the coordinated implementation of Agenda 2063. Beyond its technical component, the Forum is an important political platform that brings together Heads of State, Ministers, local governments, and partners to reflect on how Africa's urban transformation can be guided by strong governance, inclusive development, and sustainable peace.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

Africa is undergoing the world's fastest urban transition, with urbanisation. placing cities at the heart of national economic growth, social transformation, and regional integration. Equally, rapid urbanisation presents governance, infrastructure, climate, and peace and security challenges that require collective political leadership and coordinated continental action. The theme of this Forum, **“Adequate Housing for All: Advancing Socio-economic and Environmental Transformation towards the Realisation of Agenda 2063,”** speaks directly to Africa’s development priorities and political commitments.

From the African Union Perspective,

- Adequate housing is a matter of dignity and human rights;
- Adequate housing is a foundation for economic productivity;
- Adequate housing is essential for social stability and peace, and
- Adequate housing is central to sustainable and inclusive urban development.

Housing and urban development therefore represent a strategic pillar for achieving Agenda 2063 and the *‘Africa We Want.’*

The interconnected **sub-themes** of this Forum bear significant relevance and reflect the integrated and multidimensional nature of Africa’s urban transformation.

Urban infrastructure and urban development are essential for economic growth, regional integration, accessibility and mobility and service delivery. Investments in Transport, Energy, Water, and Housing Infrastructure strengthen productivity, support the implementation of the African Union infrastructure and energy agenda, and facilitate the effective functioning of the African Continental Free Trade Area by connecting markets, cities, and people.

Resilience Building and Sustainable Urban Development are critical in the context of climate change and environmental pressures. African cities must be designed to withstand climate shocks, protect vulnerable communities, and promote sustainable environmental management in line with the African Union’s climate and sustainable development commitments. The African Union’s Africa Urban Resilience Programme (AURP) provides a comprehensive framework to address contemporary disaster-related challenges, including disaster loss, livelihood and assets.

Smart Cities, Science, Technology, and Innovation are transforming urban governance and economic development. Digital systems, data-driven planning, and technological innovation can improve service delivery, enhance transparency, and create new economic opportunities, particularly for Africa’s youth and entrepreneurs.

Innovative Financing for Housing and Urban Development is essential for strengthening Local Governments and ensuring sustainable investment in cities. Sustainable financing mechanisms, Public-Private Partnerships, and regional cooperation are key to unlocking Africa’s urban potential and supporting inclusive growth.

The transformation of informal settlements remains a priority for social inclusion and human dignity. Upgrading informal settlements, securing land tenure, and expanding access to services will reduce inequality, strengthen social cohesion, and improve living conditions for millions of Africans.

Urban migration and displacement require coordinated governance and policy responses. Cities are increasingly hosting displaced populations and migrants, making urban areas central to humanitarian response, social integration, and stability.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

As I indicated earlier, the African Union’s resolve to address the issue of rapid urbanisation is anchored in the work of the Specialized Technical Committee on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development and Decentralization (AU-STC.No.8) and the Specialized

Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (AU-STC-ARDWE, No 5).

These priorities are closely linked to the broader African Union's Work Programme on Decentralisation, Local Governance, Urban Development, Infrastructure, Energy, Science and Technology, Regional Integration, Climate action, Migration governance, and Peace and Security, and we continue to urge all Member States to integrate these into national development plans.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

The theme of this Forum also aligns strongly with the African Union Theme of the Year 2026 on Water and Sanitation, which recognizes water as a strategic resource for human security, public health, and sustainable development. Urbanization and water governance are inseparable. Adequate housing requires access to clean water and sanitation; resilient cities require sustainable water systems; Public health depends on effective sanitation infrastructure, and social stability depends on equitable access to essential services.

It is our collective responsibility to take stock of the progress made by the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, national governments, and local communities in implementing the commitments adopted at the inaugural Africa Urban Forum in 2024. We must now accelerate efforts to translate these commitments into concrete actions across Africa's cities and local governments.

I am pleased to report that, over the past two years, the African Union's efforts, primarily through the implementation of the Africa Urban Resilience Programme has led to notable outcomes, including:

- Establishment of the 'Aqinile partnership', a unique partnership formed by the AUC, UNDP, UN-Habitat and UNEP to jointly address disaster risk across the continent
- The development of the Africa Common position and continental agenda raising and advocacy at global and continental fora.
- The development of regional resilience strategies for Regional Economic Communities—beginning with ECOWAS and SADC—alongside capacity building for Member States on risk-informed urban development in these regions, with plans to extend the programme to other regions over the next three years.
- The Development of a seminal report termed '**Africa Urban Resilience in Africa: A continental Review, which constitutes the AUC's main knowledge product. HE president William Ruto will have the privilege to launch today.**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

The success of Agenda 2063 will be shaped, in large part, by Africa's urban future. If well managed, urbanisation can drive industrialisation, deepen regional integration, foster peace, and enhance the quality of life for our citizens. The African Union Commission calls on Member States, Regional Economic Communities, and national and local governments to strengthen political leadership on urban development, invest in inclusive and resilient cities, empower local governments and institutions, and promote innovation and sustainable financing. Together, we must ensure that Africa's cities become engines of peace, prosperity, and integration.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The expected outcomes of this Forum, together with the Nairobi Declaration on Housing, should reflect Africa's collective commitment to adequate housing, sustainable urban development, strong local governance, climate resilience, and inclusive growth. They should reinforce the role of the Africa Urban Forum as a continental institutional platform under STC 8 and strengthen coordination among Member States, local governments, development partners, and regional institutions. Most importantly, they must reaffirm Africa's commitment to building cities that promote dignity, opportunity, and stability for all. The Nairobi Declaration must go beyond

aspirations—it must set clear commitments, measurable actions, and a practical roadmap for implementation.

In closing, the African Union Commission remains fully committed to working with Member States and partners to support Africa’s urban transformation and to advance Agenda 2063. Let us work together to build inclusive, resilient, and peaceful African cities, ensure adequate Housing for all.

I thank you for your attention and I wish us all fruitful deliberations!!!