

**High-level segment of the seventh session of the Meeting of
the Parties to the Aarhus Convention**

Thursday, 21 October 2021, 3.40–5.15 p.m.

**Statement by Raf Tuts
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Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to represent UN-Habitat at this meeting and would like to express our **support to the Geneva Declaration** on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development. The Declaration is an important milestone for transparency, effective and inclusive public participation and the respect of environmental and social standards, which are all central to UN-Habitat's normative and operational work.

In 2015, UN-Habitat's Governing Council adopted the **International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning**, as a source of inspiration and a compass for decision makers and urban professionals. The Guidelines are a global reference framework to promote more compact, socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities and territories that foster sustainable urban development and are resilient to climate change. The Guidelines highlight the linkages between urban and territorial planning and inclusive public participation in decision-making.

These Guidelines have become even more relevant in the context of the global pandemic and the climate change crisis. Participatory processes for spatial planning and the use of **new technologies** have opened new avenues to exercise public rights. This has mitigated the impact of the reduced freedom of assembly and movement, which were put in place to respond to COVID-19. Alternative tools and processes have strengthened participation of stakeholders, including vulnerable groups. Innovative approaches such as gaming and on-line toolboxes have helped the co-design of community spaces, which have been so important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, thanks to methodologies such as **Our City Plans**, the digital version of UN-Habitat's **Participatory Incremental Urban Planning Toolbox**, national and local governments have been able to move ahead with the elaboration and approval of plans, as well as the consolidation of social and physical infrastructure projects. This has resulted in new employment opportunities, contributing to the ongoing socio-economic recovery, while promoting transparency and effective and inclusive public participation.

In relation to the **impacts of spatial planning and large-scale infrastructure on ecosystems and people's health and well-being**, it has become critical to fully consider environmental and social concerns from the outset in plans, programmes and projects. UN-Habitat has recently adopted its **Environmental and Social Safeguards System 3.0**, for which an agency-wide capacity development exercise is being rolled out.

In this regard, we are committed to integrating the principles of **ecosystem services and nature-based solutions** in newly developed infrastructure and spatial plans, and we seek innovation in how green infrastructure is designed, developed, financed and maintained.

UN-Habitat has recently applied the above approaches, in several **cities in the UNECE region**, including Lisbon, Madrid, Pristina, Minsk, Gävle, Sandviken, Khorog and Yakutsk.

We are looking forward to contributing to the localization of the Geneva Declaration, as we further promote transparency and effective and inclusive public participation in spatial planning.

Thank you for your attention.

For further details:

International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning

<https://unhabitat.org/international-guidelines-on-urban-and-territorial-planning>

Participatory Incremental Urban Planning Toolbox

<https://unhabitat.org/participatory-incremental-urban-planning-toolbox-a-toolbox-to-support-local-governments-in>