

**Draft Statement by H.E. Dr. Talal Abu Ghazaleh,
Chairman, TAGOrg and iTSUN, at the United Nations
on the occasion of the World Habitat Day**

5 October, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, friends,

It is a great privilege for me to speak on this important occasion of the World Habitat Day. I join you today as a business leader committed to the goal of global sustainability and in my capacity as the Co-Chair of the Digital Technologies for Sustainable Urbanization Network or iTSUN.

I wish to thank my good friends, Dr. Jean Clos, Executive Director of UN Habitat and Dr. Aliye Celik, the President of the Consortium for Sustainable Urbanization for inviting me to speak at this important event on a theme which has global resonance and urgency.

The world today is poised to make a historic new beginning.

Just a few days ago, the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development adopted a land mark Agenda 2030: Transforming Our World.

At the heart of this global and universal Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Develop Goals to which all the leaders of the world have committed at the UN Summit. Goal 11 calls for making “cities and urban settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.”

In an increasingly urbanized world, where the majority of the people live in cities, it will not be possible to ensure a sustainable future for mankind without making cities and urban settlements more sustainable.

The future of mankind is urban. Sustainable urbanization is, therefore, an indispensable imperative.

A fundamental principle and necessary condition for urban sustainability is the creation and maintenance of adequate and good quality public spaces for all, which is the theme of this World Habitat Day.

As we remake the cities of today and build the urban centers of tomorrow we need to re-examine our priorities, policies and planning in light of a New Urban Agenda which recognizes the centrality of accessible public spaces in urban settings.

The current paradigm of urbanization is based on wasteful use of land and other precious resources, such as energy and water, and is centered on automobile use, leading to suburban sprawl and un-planned expansion of cities. This type of urban development simply cannot be sustained for long. Apart from contributing to environmental degradation and climate change, It has exacerbated spatial inequality which often leads to social segregation, slum formation and unequal access to jobs, health and education services. Rather than fostering well-knit communities living together, it has led to greater socio-economic divisions, growing inequality, political instability and strife.

Good urban planning, design and architecture should articulate an integrative relationship between private and public uses of urban spaces in ways that make urban centers inclusive , give a sense of

belonging to citizens, attract visitors and investment and enhance the quality of life, while ensuring the most optimum and efficient use of scarce resources and protect the environment.

Central to this approach is the creation of public spaces accessible to all, which define the character and image of a city. Accessible public spaces foster community spirit and pride, allow interactions among citizens without discrimination and promote the flow of people, goods, commerce and economic activity. Parks, trees and green belts help combat pollution serving as the lungs of the city. Playgrounds foster healthy pursuits by children and youth. Easily navigable streets with broad spaces for pedestrian traffic create an attractive social space for people to intermingle. Great squares and public buildings generate a sense of history and a shared heritage among the people. Cities built to foster communities rather than on income criteria are likely to create greater harmony and peace.

In this information age, digital technologies must be seen as an essential component of a modern urban infrastructure and a strategic tool for good urban planning and design. If we use digital technologies to build smart cities with smart land use, smart roads and buildings, smart energy grids, smart water supply and smart, less polluting vehicles, we can help bring about a shift from the current paradigm to a new more sustainable model of urban development. With its research and development capacity, its entrepreneurial spirit and its ability to make the needed investments, the private sector has a key role to play in meeting this challenge.

Mr. Chairman,

We in the private sector are ready to contribute our share to help create good quality public spaces for all as a central tenet of the new sustainable urbanization agenda. The private sector can contribute with its knowledge and expertise to devise innovative digital solutions, make the necessary investments and bring its can-do spirit to this great cause.

I call upon business leaders from around the world to join hands with public policy-makers and urban planners, the academic community and other stakeholders in a genuine global partnership to promote and implement a new, more integrative agenda for sustainable urbanization and help rectify the growing imbalance between private and public land use by creating public spaces for all.

It is with this objective in mind that a new Digital Technologies for Sustainable Urbanization Network was set up in July this year under the aegis of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and UN Habitat. The Network provides a platform for collaboration among all stakeholders for harnessing the digital revolution in the service of smart and sustainable urbanization. I encourage you to join this Network and participate in its First Global Forum to be held in Barcelona on 16 November this year in the context of the Smart City Expo World Congress.

See you all in Barcelona.

I thank you.

