

Chairman Office

مكتب الرئيس

The Role of Technology

Implementing the New Urban Agenda to Achieve Sustainable Development

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Conference Room 2

20 June 2018 / 10 AM to 6 PM

Talking Points

Dr. Talal Abu Ghazaleh

Chairman, TAGOrg and Hon. Chairman of the CSU Executive Council
(Opening Session)

Mr. Chairman, Madame Deputy Secretary General,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to join in welcoming you all and make a few remarks at the opening session of this important conference at the United Nations on the role of technology in urban development.

I would like to salute and pay tribute to the Secretary General and to Ms Amina Mohammad, our Deputy Secretary General, for their visionary leadership and pioneering effort to pull the entire UN system together and reposition it to meet the great ambition and many challenges of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. We in the business community admire and welcome their efforts and look forward to working in partnership with a renewed United Nations to secure a prosperous and sustainable future for all.

As a business leader with a lifelong commitment to the United Nations, I take pride in having led the first United Nations multi-stakeholder Task Force on ICT for Development set up by Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2001 to advance the Millennium Development Goals. This high-level Task Force contributed significantly to bringing the IT and the development communities together and succeeded in putting technology in the service of the UN Development Goals.

I welcome the recent initiative of Secretary General Antonio Guterres to set up a Task Force on Artificial Intelligence and the establishment of a Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries. These are important steps in the right direction. Still, much more needs to be done to unlock the full potential of new and emerging technologies to advance the SDGs. TAGOrg would be happy to support any UN effort to mobilize all major stakeholders towards this end.

I would also like to thank and salute UN-HABITAT for joining with TAGOrg, two years ago, in launching Network 11 under the auspices of ECOSOC as a multi-stakeholder platform for harnessing the power of technology to advance sustainable urbanization and the New Urban Agenda. I welcome the commitment of UN-

HABITAT, under its new Executive Director, Ms. Maimouna Shareef, to this initiative, and in turn commit myself to its success.

Today's powerful event is an eloquent testimony to the role CSU is playing, in collaboration with UN-HABITAT and TAGOrg , in convening key stakeholders to discuss the critical issues relating to the future of urbanization.

Mr. Chairman,

Throughout human history, advances in technology have given rise to great cities.

And, technology and urbanization have been perhaps the most powerful forces propelling human progress. Indeed, the story of civilization has been a story of technological progress, mostly in urban settings.

At the dawn of history, the invention of agriculture and new farming techniques gave rise to the ancient Mesopotamian cities of Ahkud, Assur, Babylon and Nineveh in the Middle East. In turn, these cities became centers of technological progress leading to specialization and trade, thus, connecting people and products and generating wealth and prosperity.

New and emerging technologies have also driven major shifts on how cities are planned and function.

The industrial revolution transformed major European cities from medieval fortresses to modern, dense, but open habitats, with no walls, built around industry, infrastructure and closely knit urban centers.

The advent of electricity and the automobile called for new forms of urban design, systems and structures: from urban centers to high-rises, from ring-roads to auto-routes and sprawling suburbs that pose such complex challenges to the urban planners of today.

And now, we face a new urban transition, driven by the digital revolution and new and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous vehicles, internet of things, 3-D printing, quantum computing, nano and bio-technologies and materials science. If we harness this fourth industrial revolution well, we are capable of building truly smart cities which can function intelligently and, therefore, efficiently. With more efficient use of land, water, energy and building materials and fully recyclable waste, smart cities would become more sustainable. And with better, more effective and intelligent public policies, smart cities

could also become more hospitable for their inhabitants -and provide better services more equitably.

Yet, we know that all this is easier said than done. There are immense and complex questions and challenges with ethical, moral, political, economic and social dimensions that call for open and thorough dialogue and debate among all stake-holders to be addressed, as we try to build this new technologically enabled urban nirvana.

And as the pace of technological disruption and innovation continues to accelerate there is no time to lose. That is why we have gathered here today. The panel discussions on many of these issues promise to be very stimulating and, it is my hope and conviction, will help to move this debate forward.

In conclusion, let me pose a challenge to all of us: Every day we all work hard to better our own lives. Today, let us all pledge to make the same commitment to sustain a better life for all humanity and save the life of this planet- our Mother Earth.

I thank you.