**Address by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) President, Mr Mpho Parks Tau, at the Urban Age Conference, Addis Ababa**

Theme: *'Governing Urban Change'*

29 November 2018

Co-chairs,
Fellow panellists,
Distinguishes guests, and
Ladies and gentlemen:

**Introduction**

I am pleased to participate at this year's Urban Age Conference hosted in Addis Ababa which is, rightly so, the political capital of Africa.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the organisers and partners for making this two-day Conference possible.

The overall theme of this Conference, namely *'Developing Urban Future'*, is timely since it comes in the background of other recent milestone events.

The first important milestone is the Africities 8 Summit held in Marrakech, Morocco last week. This Summit is noteworthy since it registered an unprecedented 8,000 participants representing 77 countries focused on tabling and proposing solutions to inter- and intra-migration, climate change, urban planning and management as a tool for transitioning to sustainable cities and territories.

The second milestone event was the Africa Investment Forum, held in Johannesburg, South Africa. This Forum, co-hosted with the Gauteng Premier's office, David Makhura, went against the usual grain by emphasising boardroom-like transactions and practical investment projects. The outcome was the securing of 49 projects worth U$38-billion from the 300 institutional investors from 53 African countries.

The message was clear, that Africans are prioritising seeking solutions from within the continent rather than continue to focus on aid and development from without. Self-reliance and self-dependence is now this code-word.

It is within this context that this Urban Age Conference is especially welcomed looking as it does on issues of continental financial flows, super-urbanisation, the youth and urban dividend, and urban governance plus inter-governmental relations.

Dear friends and dear colleagues,

**Improving urban governance standards in African cities**

What do we mean exactly when we talk of 'governance'?

I wish to believe it is not meant a mechanistic version, from the World Bank's managerialist and developmental paradigm which highlights merely accountability and efficiency.

Rather, I subscribe to a definition offered by the UN-Habitat, which views governance more broadly as appreciating that "power exists inside and outside the formal authority and institutions of government" and that, therefore, "decisions are made based on complex relationships between many actors with different priorities" (UN-Habitat 2002: 12-13)[1].

This explains why in South Africa we have adopted the mantra that commits every stakeholder in government, the private sector and in civil society to mobilise around 'An all of government, whole of society approach'.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe there are three several interrelated aspects to take into account when managing governance in Africa.

The first issue is that we need to take into consideration the unprecedented increase in urban life that we will witness in Africa in the next 30 years, with more than 900-million urban dwellers expected to appear by 2050.

We need to address this, all the while acknowledging that the growth will not only happen in large metropolises and that smaller and intermediary cities will need to be taken into account when planning the urban future in order to co-create the African urban landscape.

The second issue to take into consideration is growing disparities and inequalities. There are both spatial and social inequalities that will need to be address in this urban era. The integration of the Right to the City, developed inclusion policies, and people-centred agendas will need to be part of our policies if we want to create opportunities for our youth and address the phenomenon of informalities.

In order to improve the standards of living in cities across Africa and ensure the access to basic services, we need an enabling regulatory environment and the access to funding in order to provide to our citizens.

From the UCLG perspective, the ambitious 2030 Global Agenda commitments and the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator can be part of the solution at local and regional level in our continent and beyond.

These Global Agendas, deeply grounded at territorial level, can allow us to overcome the urban-rural dichotomy that has impeded genuine continental territorial development. The

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[1] UN-Habitat. 2002. *Global Campaign on Urban Governance: Concept Paper*, Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

development of national urban policies, based on multilevel dialogue will be instrumental to create a new model of governance fit for purpose.

Renewal in governance need to take factor in that local governments need a financial ecosystem that takes into account local contexts and, in this case, local African contexts. This environment should provide long-term finance for projects and investment programs at the right price as was achieved at the Africa Investment Forum.

If governance is to be improved beyond strengthening the local democracy mechanisms, and regaining the public trust, through the implementation of the Right to the City paradigm, there needs to be a clear investment in the human resources of the local governments in the continent. This will be done in order to deliver the type of service provision needed by the growing urban population of Africa and its vibrant entrepreneurship based on 21st century models enabled and ensured by the fourth industrial revolution. In this case, skilled young professionals will need to be attracted to the public sector, specifically local sector, if we want the 2030 goals to be achieved.

When we say Africa has the largest youthful population that still remains untapped, it simply means we need to do more to maximise our cities as centres of innovation and economic agglomeration. The relationship between demographic dividend, economic growth and technological innovation is well and truly exploited in Kigali and Nairobi, for local benefit, with the examples of the legendary M-PESA model.

**State of urban governance in cities across the continent**

We are all familiar with the problematiques affecting our metropolises in, for instance, Accra and Addis Ababa, ranging from infrastructure backlogs, pollution, lack of requisite financing frameworks, and seeing African as extraction sites.

And given that, in the words of Ivan Turok, "cities function as catalysts for prosperity…through reduced logistics costs, shared services", in this regard, "
the "question is not how to curb the growth of cities, but how to harness the energy and productive potential of intense human interaction in concentrated populations" (2018: 2)[2].

It is thus encouraging to learn that some megacities, like Lagos, are not waiting for their national government to respond to challenges of uneven power distribution and supply. Instead, Lagos is emphasising its autonomy by putting in place effective measures to sustainably generate its own electricity so that it becomes it becomes independent from pressures and demands on the national grid.

This is a reason we call upon our respective national governments to actively support and capacitate cities and metropolitan areas with adequate resources because cities are more responsive to keeping pace with, for example, super-urbanisation.

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[2] Turok, I and Visagie, J. 2018. *Does Moving to a City Mean a Better Life? New Evidence.* Econ3X3, April.

As a recent report by the development economist, Somik Lall states: "African cities are closed to the world" and to each other. Instead, "cities in Africa produce few goods and services for trade on regional markets" (*African Cities: Opening Doors to the World*, 2017)[3].

This lack of internal and external trade, implies the sheer scale of advantages that can be leveraged if Africa cities, big and small, prioritise inter-Africa trade and economic cooperation between our respective regional blocs. For instance, the collective economic contribution of Mombasa and Abidjan remains untapped and not fully maximised since these are nascent centres for trade and logistics whether you are talking roads, air or sea travel.

In this regard, cities and city-regions are important levers in facilitating inclusive urbanism for the simple reason that Africa possesses, as agglomerate economies, what other continents and regions envy, i.e., our abundant natural resources and our young human capital.

In the words of the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms Mohammed, "we need to get urbanization right" and this is dependent on inclusive and integrated "national urban policies to ensure balanced territorial development, and urban design and land use planning to promote growth, climate mitigation, urban resilience and poverty eradication."

Session chairs,


**Finding symmetry between local and national governments**

There can be no denial that finding symmetry between local, regional and national governments is critical for sustainable developing urban futures.

This is a reason why, from the beginning, my mandate as UCLG president has been determinedly focused on a commitment to governmental decentralisation based on the following:

- Promote effective systems of multi-level governance, according to the principle of subsidiarity and in the interdependence of local, provincial and national government;
- Encourage the establishment of national enabling environments for local government with the necessary political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation; and
- Focus on encouraging localisation of resources to local government building on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, access to PPPs and private sector finances, and where feasible, to international capital markets and climate finance.

**In closing,**

In closing therefore, finding a local-provincial-national government symmetry is a result of my belief that, quite simply, governance is a "collective practice addressing societal problems" for, first, "land allocation and land use management", second, "the provision and management of basic infrastructure/services", and third, "the movement/accessibility system,

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[3] Lall, Somik Vinay et al. 2017. *Africa's Cities: Opening Doors to the World*. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/25896

which is essentially about how people and goods can get around from one part of the settlement to another" (Smit 2018: 7-8)[4].

I look forward to sharing perspectives over the next two days so that we propose lasting and practical solutions.

I thank you.

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[4] Smit, Warren. 2018. 'Urban Governance in Africa: An Overview', *International Development Policy Revue*, 10, pp. 55-77.