



**South Africa's Country Statement delivered by Ms. Tandi Mahambehlala, MP  
Deputy Minister of Human Settlements  
at the Inaugural African Urban Forum, Addis Ababa, 5 September 2024**

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Program Director ,  
Commissioners of the African Union,  
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers, Ambassadors and Heads of Delegation,  
Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme  
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa  
Mayors and Local Government Representatives  
Members of Civil Society and Academia,  
Fellow participants,  
ALLOW ME TO GREET YOU

It is an honour for me to stand on this pedestal representing my country also leading a very formidable delegation from the South African local government association(SALGA) to academia with my colleague the Deputy Minister of cooperative governance and traditional affairs Dr Dickson Masemola on this auspicious occasion.

Urbanisation, the movement of people from rural areas to cities and towns, is a global mega-trend with significant implications for Africa's development. It represents a transformation from a rural, agrarian society to an urban industrialised one. This process leads to an increase in urban population and involves key characteristics such as population growth, migration, urban expansion, changes in land use, economic shifts, cultural changes, and infrastructure development.

Africa is the most rapidly urbanising region in the world. This rapid urbanisation has been accompanied by the “urbanisation of poverty” as people migrate to cities to escape rural hardships. Many African cities and towns are not equipped to handle such levels of population growth, resulting in an estimated 60% of the continent’s urban population living in slums and informal settlements.

**The late former President of South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela said the following about this phenomenon: “*Poverty reduction and upgrading of informal settlements will not be possible unless cities are productive and efficient, and capable of providing the poor with economic opportunities to build their assets and incomes.*”**

Urbanisation involves several types, including rural-urban migration, urban sprawl, sub-urbanisation, and re-urbanisation. Each type presents unique challenges and opportunities. For instance, rural-urban migration increases the urban population, while urban sprawl results in the unplanned growth of cities, into surrounding rural areas. Suburbanisation fosters the growth of satellite towns, and re-urbanisation revitalises urban areas through gentrification and renewal.

### **Your Excellencies**

South Africa recognises that if properly managed, urbanisation could support the structural transformation of Africa. The transition from an agriculture-based economy to one focused on industry and services is largely urban-driven, with cities contributing the bulk of GDP. However, much of the urban employment remains informal, highlighting the need for more formal job creation, particularly for our youth.

Urbanisation also brings cultural changes, with shifts in lifestyle, behaviour, and cultural practices as people adapt to urban environments. Moreover, infrastructure development becomes critical as cities expand, requiring growth in housing, transportation, and amenities.

While urbanisation offers economic growth, improved access to services and amenities, and increased opportunities for education and employment, it also presents challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Many urban

areas struggle with spatial development, housing supply, and the provision of adequate, affordable, and sustainable infrastructure, especially energy, water, and sanitation.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

A key strategy to address these challenges is the prioritisation of transforming informal settlements and slums. Upgrading these areas can enhance resilience, safety, and social cohesion, especially when targeted interventions protect vulnerable groups such as women, youth, children, the elderly, and people living with disabilities. This focus on improving informal settlements is crucial not only for urban development but also for achieving the goals of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

South Africa believes that urbanisation should not only focus on cities but also offer opportunities for rural development. Rural economic transformation requires a system of urban centres that provides markets, services, and linkages. It is essential to harness urbanisation as a force for structural, social, and spatial transformation along the rural-urban continuum.

### **Your excellencies**

To achieve our development vision, we must recognise that sustainable urban development requires a comprehensive all-of-government and all-of-society approach. Urbanisation cannot be separated from the overall economic, social, political, and physical development of any region, country, or continent.

As African Ministers responsible for housing and urban development, we have endorsed the harmonised framework for implementing the New Urban Agenda in Africa. This framework should guide us as we navigate the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation and galvanise all stakeholders, including governments, financial institutions, private developers, and civil society around a common purpose.

### **Your Excellencies**

In conclusion, I would like to thank the host government, Ethiopia for their warm hospitality and congratulate them for all the arrangements for a successful inaugural session of the Africa Urban Forum. We must ensure that we strengthen and sustain

this platform as an African collective to advance our common agenda. As Member States of the Union prepare to facilitate the changing of the guard in 2025, we must impress upon the incoming top leadership of the Commission and the Commissioners the need to support and advance our agenda through the African Urban Forum.

Thank you.