



**COUNTRY STATEMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**DELIVERED BY HON. MS T SIMELANE
MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS**

**Thirteenth Session of the World Urban Forum
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Programme Director

Mr. Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee on Urban Planning and
Architecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Executive Director and Undersecretary General of the United Nations Human
Settlements Programme, Ms Annacláudia Rossbach

Honourable Ministers

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to express the sincere gratitude of our delegation to the Government and People of the Republic of Azerbaijan, for the excellent preparations for yet another landmark edition of the World Urban Forum. My delegation has experienced a very warm welcome and generous hospitality since we arrived in this “land of Fire”, and the home of the Flame Towers.

South Africa’s macro-policy for managing urbanisation was adopted in April 2016, five months before the New Urban Agenda was endorsed in October of the same year. The Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) serves as the government’s primary macro-policy for managing urbanisation. This policy also includes provisions for spatial transformation aimed at addressing the historical injustices caused by racial segregation of our population. At the time the New Urban Agenda was adopted, South Africa was over 60% urbanised; recent data indicates that this figure has grown to

68.82%, and it is projected to reach 71.3% by 2030. Urbanisation is undeniably an irreversible trend.

Notwithstanding the opportunities it has presented for urban development in our country, urbanisation has, however contributed to persistent spatial inequality, challenges in basic services delivery, infrastructure backlogs, and overburdened municipal governance systems, which remain defining characteristics of South African cities. Despite decades of democratic planning and investment, our cities and towns continue to reflect inherited patterns of exclusion and distance, with many residents living far from economic opportunities. Other urban development challenges, such as uneven public transport systems and exclusionary land markets, perpetuate inequality. Informal practices in land use, housing, and livelihoods pose significant developmental, policy, and management challenges within our urban spaces. These issues highlight both the dynamic nature of urbanisation and the limitations of current planning and service-delivery systems.

Additionally, cities and towns face the dual challenge of extending infrastructure to growing populations while concurrently maintaining, renewing, and upgrading aging assets amid financial constraints, inadequate capital planning, insufficient maintenance, and institutional weaknesses. Despite these pressures, South Africa has made substantial progress in advancing sustainable urbanisation, anchored in the principal provisions of our Constitution, the National Development Plan, and other Development Frameworks, including the District Development Model. Our national development frameworks are aligned with international agreements and protocols, including the New Urban Agenda, the African Union Agenda 2063, and the Southern African Development Regional Development Plan, among others.

My country acknowledges the profound global challenges impacting urban environments, including the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental and climate-related crises, local effects of geopolitical tensions and conflicts, and the increasing prevalence of social risks such as growing inequality, informality, unemployment, and rapid migration. These circumstances have significantly increased demand for essential services, including housing, health, education, water, and sanitation, while placing considerable pressure on public resources and the state's capacity to provide timely interventions to address these urban challenges.

The government is actively addressing urban challenges through a comprehensive suite of strategic initiatives. These include reviewing the IUDF Implementation Framework to enhance leadership and coordination across all levels of government and to ensure meaningful whole-of-government and whole-of-society stakeholder participation. The Department of Human Settlements has updated the White Paper on Human Settlements. **Furthermore, government is in the process of reviewing the White Paper on Local government which is the foundational policy mandate for the local government system, which plays a critical role for South Africa to deliver on the urban**

transformation agenda. The updates are complemented by ongoing reforms to policies and legislative frameworks to accelerate service delivery.

In relation to adequate housing delivery, when adopting the 2026 National Progress Report on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda, in February this year, Cabinet mandated my department to develop a strategy to address the construction of informal structures in dangerous, disaster-prone locations, including medium- to long- term solutions for Temporary Residential Units (TRUs). This includes accelerating the transformation of informal settlements and slums.

In partnership with key sector stakeholders, the country has held two editions of the National Urban Forum (NUF) in 2024 and 2025. The NUF sessions provided a platform to evaluate and advance progress towards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG11, thereby promoting development targets on issues such as low-carbon and disaster-resilient urban development, the construction of sustainable human settlements, and highlighting innovative and inclusive urban planning approaches. In both editions of the National Urban Forums, our sector stakeholders renewed and reiterated their resolve to: (1) strengthen institutional mechanisms to improve governance; (2) forge partnerships to explore a developmental finance mechanism for local governments, shifting focus from national government grants; (3) develop technical skills to manage modern and innovative governance systems; (4) advance climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable solutions in the implementation of our urban development frameworks; (5) develop policies that recognise and reinforce linkages between rural and urban spaces as interconnected centres for sustainable development; (6) implement social compact that prioritise youth unemployment, urban safety, land reform, integrated human settlements, and infrastructure development through partnerships with local industries.

Urbanisation in South Africa is characterised not only by population growth in cities but also by the expansion of large urban agglomerations and functionally integrated city regions. Beyond metropolitan municipalities, intermediate city municipalities (ICMs) and emerging urban regions are becoming increasingly important players in the national space economy. These areas serve a strategic role in connecting metropolitan centres to surrounding local economies, smaller towns, and rural hinterlands; they often function as administrative centres, logistics hubs, labour markets, and regional service centres. ICMs typically lack the scale advantages, institutional depth, and fiscal capacity available to larger metropolitan governments.

Through the IUDF and the District Development Model, the government has outlined a policy framework for transforming and restructuring South Africa's urban spaces, guided by the vision of creating functional, safe, resource-efficient cities and towns that are socially integrated, economically inclusive, and globally competitive, where residents actively participate in urban life. The government recognises that achieving the envisioned urban transformation will require a comprehensive, society-wide and

government-wide approach, as a diverse range of stakeholders shapes cities. This includes various levels and sectors of government, the private sector, non-profit organisations, local community groups, academic and professional organisations, and sector interest groups.

As is the case with other countries, urbanisation in South Africa intersects with multiple public policy spheres, including economic policy, infrastructure planning, local government reform, environmental management, social development, and spatial planning. Therefore, urbanisation cannot simply be managed or monitored; it must be governed intentionally and strategically. Central to this strategy are evidence-based policies and decision-making processes; the deliberate use of existing planning and reporting systems to unlock service delivery bottlenecks; clearer governance mechanisms; more active engagement with communities in their various organised forms; and effective and efficient public institutions fit for purpose in transforming opportunities into qualitative living standards, real and tangible jobs, and sustainable employment for our people.

Our 2026 Country Report on Progress in the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda reveals that government efforts, through the Department of Human Settlements, to coordinate domestic partnerships focusing on expanding access to social housing funding sources tailored to various income levels, and encouraging public-private partnerships responsive to community needs and requirements, are timely and would significantly help improve access to adequate housing. Our efforts include stimulating private-sector investments in human settlements and encouraging financial institutions to lend to low- and middle-income earners, thereby reducing dependence on government subsidies.

South Africa's 2026 NUA report further encourages the government to strengthen its cooperative governance framework by enhancing the existing multilevel and multistakeholder collaborations. This approach is regarded as fundamental to achieving the apex priorities of the seventh administration, namely; inclusive job creation and economic growth, reduction of poverty and cost-of-living pressures, and the establishment of a capable, ethical, and developmental state responsive to the basic needs of the citizens.

My delegation is looking forward to fruitful engagements at this Thirteenth Session of the World Urban Forum, particularly to the sharing of best practices and experiences, building partnerships and collaborations on innovative solutions to housing delivery models, including driving down the costs of housing construction through scaling of innovative building technologies and rapid responses to natural disasters and emergencies.

I thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to deliver my country's statement.