President of the General Assembly,
President of the 25th Session of the Governing Council of the UN-Habitat,
Executive Director of UN-Habitat,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join the 26th session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council. On behalf of my Government and the people of Kenya, I am delighted to welcome you all to Kenya. Karibuni sana!

Let me also extend a warm and special welcome to His Excellency Peter Thompson, the President of the 71st session of General Assembly of the United Nations.

We commend you for your unwavering commitment to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
This session is a milestone for UN-Habitat. It is the first meeting of the Governing Council after the adoption of the momentous 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the New Urban Agenda. As you know, the 2030 Agenda is a comprehensive, integrated and inclusive outcome document.

It aims to achieve peace, prosperity, dignity and opportunity for all, on a healthy planet. I congratulate each and every one of you for your invaluable contribution to the success of Habitat III. That enterprise shows the power and promise of multilateralism.

Turning to the New Urban Agenda, I am informed that it sets our global strategy around urbanization for the next two decades.

Further, it presents a renewed political commitment for sustainable development, and provides the basis for reviewing the mandate of the UN-Habitat and its positioning within the UN System.

Our immediate responsibility is its implementation. We must quickly seize the opportunities, address the challenges and implement the Agenda.

The first step – one we can take here and now – is to send a strong political message in support of the new Agenda. That, Ladies and Gentlemen, is what leadership demands of us.

As host of the UN-Habitat, Kenya remains fully committed to the Agency. My Administration is ready to contribute constructively, and to work in partnership with you to secure the objectives of this important Session of the Governing Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Let us consider the task that lies before us. Projections suggest that an additional 2.5 billion people will enter urban areas by 2050. Almost 90 percent of this increase is expected to occur in Asia and Africa. I need not add that this should be a matter of concern to all of us.

The challenge is equally clear here in Kenya. According to our National Bureau of Statistics, by 2050 about half our people will live in cities.

Indeed, in 2030, the city of Nairobi will have about 6 million people.

For our part we have found that the creation of 47 counties under our new constitution has significantly influenced Kenya’s urbanization: our new county governments will handle much of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. That’s because counties are the homes of the secondary cities, which are growing faster than the primary cities.

We believe they have great potential for economic growth and employment creation. To this end, our Vision 2030 is geared towards promoting integrated regional and urban planning and management in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We strongly believe, also, that new and sustainable technologies will play an important role in human settlements, especially through industrial building systems.

In recognition of this, we have taken up Industrial Building Systems in the construction of housing. I am pleased to report that our National Housing Corporation has set up a factory for such sustainable building systems. And we are promoting the development of environmentally friendly buildings and green energy.

We are focusing on three main things, notably: changes in governance to meet the challenge of the new urbanization; an awareness of the opportunities presented by the new urbanization; and a turn to technology to meet the new needs. Those, one might say, are the main ingredients of Kenya’s policy mix, to meet the new challenge. We believe that we can learn from others, and we hope that others will be willing to learn from us. That is why we welcome collaboration and partnerships in these areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
The New Urban Agenda matters to us. It gives us a collective approach to the challenges our towns, cities and urban areas face today and tomorrow. It presents a paradigm shift based on a clear vision of the interconnections between economic growth, standards of living and environmental sustainability. It is time now for all of us to act jointly to achieve our shared vision.

That vision, I believe, may be stated in a sentence: we want smart towns and cities – economically viable, socially livable, environmentally resilient and politically stable settlements. The task may seem formidable; it is not insurmountable. What we do here, at this meeting, will determine whether we will fail or succeed.

Our first task, if I may say so, is a reform of UN-Habitat. We will achieve our goals only if it can serve as a focal agency for sustainable urbanization and human settlements. It will not
do so if its capacity is not strengthened. That is why we must empower UN-Habitat with the resources it needs – and these resources must be adequate and predictable.

You will recall that at the last Governing Council meeting, my Government made a substantive voluntary contribution to UN-Habitat.

I commend that example to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, and I urge member states to consider enhancing their contributions to the UN-Habitat. Equally, the Agency itself needs reform, and to be more innovative in its resource mobilization strategies.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
My Government welcomes the recent appointment by the UN Secretary-General, of a High-level panel of experts to conduct an evidence-based and independent assessment of UN-Habitat. We believe the initiative is timely.

In light of recent challenges – challenges that will not be unfamiliar to any of us – I believe that the organization and structure of the agency requires reform to make it more effective, efficient, accountable and transparent in its decisions, and their making.

We look forward, then, to the recommendations of the high-level panel. We expect the panel to contribute positively when we discuss the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the high-level meeting, during the seventy-first session of the UN General Assembly in September this year.

Executive Director, I am informed that your tenure at UN-Habitat will end later this year.

Despite the challenges the organization has experienced in recent years, it would be remiss of me if I did not recognize your valuable contribution as the Secretary-General of Habitat III. I wish you well in your future endeavours.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
A new world is within our reach – a world of green, livable, and prosperous towns and cities. If we join hands in common effort, that world will be ours.

There are few more important tasks for our generation. I ask you all to keep this uppermost in your minds in all your deliberations.

With these few remarks it is now my pleasure to declare the Governing Council officially open.

Thank you and God bless you.