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on the occasion of the High-level Preparatory meeting of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028:

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Good afternoon I am from UN Habitat where we advocate for a better urban future, and water and sanitation is a key cornerstone for this.

Just four years ago 55.3 per cent of the world’s population lived in urban settlements. By 2030, urban areas are projected to house 60 per cent of people. By 2050, the world urban population is expected to nearly double, making urbanization one of the 21st century’s most transformative trends.

The growth in urban population is creating pressure on freshwater resources through increased water demands and pollution. According to one estimate, every day, close to 180,000 new urban dwellers need access to water, sanitation and other basic services in the developing world. And we are struggling to keep up.

The numbers of people in urban settlements without proper access to water supply and sanitation is increasing. Today, over 700 million urban residents live without improved sanitation, contributing to poor health conditions and heavy pollution loads in wastewater, and over 156 million live without improved water sources.

In the context of the theme water for health: Cities are where the battle for improved water and sanitation needs to be fought, as well as for improved wastewater management. Without this shift in mindsets it will be difficult to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs. Water and sanitation operators have an important contribution to make in this context.

In the context of water for development: investing in water and sanitation in cities will have great returns in investment as it is in cities where 80% of the world’s economy is generated. Cities and human settlements are also the hubs of innovation and transformation from where ripple effects can move to other places.

Ladies and gentlemen in closing, cities, human settlements and regions are well placed to contribute to the transformative game changer suggested earlier.