Side Event Concept Note:

Sustainable Urbanization through Three Zeros: Transforming Cities for a Resilient Future

Time and Date: 13:15-14:15, Monday 21st April 2025

Venue: Meeting Room A, United Nations Conference Center, Bangkok, Thailand

Organized by: Government of Bangladesh

1. Background

The 81st Commission Sessions (CS81) of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), scheduled to take place from April 21-25 2025, is dedicated to "Regional Cooperation for Resilient and Sustainable Urban Development in Asia and the Pacific." In line with this overarching theme, Bangladesh proposes a side event titled "Sustainable Urbanization through Three Zeros: Transforming Cities for a Resilient Future." This side event will showcase innovative urban development strategies that align with the principles of sustainable growth, resilience, and inclusivity, especially in the context of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) approaching graduation. By embedding these principles, participatory housing solutions can serve as transformative tools for achieving sustainable urban development.

The concept of the "Three Zeros" comes from Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus's book "A World of Three Zeros: The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions," which provides a framework for a sustainable and equitable future. The Three Zeros—Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions—offer a roadmap for rethinking urban development in a way that promotes social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.

2. Theme and Objectives

The central theme of this side event is to explore how the "Three Zeros" can be applied to urbanization processes especially in graduating LDCs, particularly as they undergo significant transformation. With many developing countries rapidly urbanizing while trying to meet demands

for housing and basic services, it is essential to ensure that their urban growth is both sustainable and resilient.

The specific objectives of the side event are as follows:

1. Examine the role of urbanization in advancing the Three Zeros (Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, Zero Net Carbon Emissions).

2. Identify practical solutions and strategies for achieving inclusive and sustainable urban development through regional cooperation, with a focus on poverty alleviation and housing, job creation, and environmental sustainability.

3. Discuss the role of regional cooperation in strengthening resilience against urban challenges such as climate change, migration, and economic inequality, particularly in cities undergoing rapid growth.

4. Highlight best practices and success stories from Bangladesh and other countries that have successfully integrated the Three Zeros into their urban development and housing strategies.

5. Promote dialogue between governments, private sector actors, civil society, and international organizations to foster collaboration and innovation in sustainable urbanization.

3. Focus Areas

The side event will address key focus areas for achieving the Three Zeros in urbanization, particularly:

- Zero Poverty: Exploring strategies to eradicate urban poverty, focusing on equitable access to housing and basic services. The role of community driven social housing models, inclusive urban planning, and economic opportunities in reducing urban poverty will be discussed.

- Zero Unemployment: Examining how urbanization can be a driver of economic growth and job creation. The role of innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic policies in generating sustainable employment, particularly for youth and marginalized groups, will be explored.

- Zero Net Carbon Emissions: Discussing the transition towards sustainable cities through the reduction of carbon footprints and the promotion of green infrastructure. This will include exploring clean energy solutions, sustainable mobility, waste management, and climate-resilient housing and urban planning.

- Regional Cooperation: Highlighting the importance of regional partnerships in fostering knowledge exchange, financial investment, and technical assistance to support developing countries in their urban transformation journeys.

4. Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the side event include:

1. A shared understanding of how the Three Zeros can serve as a guiding framework for sustainable urbanization in developing Asia-Pacific.

2. Actionable policy recommendations for governments, stakeholders, development partners and urban planners on integrating the Three Zeros into urban development strategies, especially in emerging cities facing rapid growth and transition.

3. Commitment to regional collaboration among countries in the Asia-Pacific region to tackle common urban challenges and share knowledge, technology, and resources.

4. Strengthened partnerships between government, private sector, and civil society to develop innovative solutions for inclusive, resilient, and low-carbon urbanization.

5. Increased awareness of the importance of sustainable urbanization as a pathway to achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and the broader goals of urban poverty reduction, adequate housing, job creation, and local climate action.

5. Format

The event will take place on Monday 21st April 2025 from 13:15 to 14:15 hours in Meeting Room A, United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok along the sidelines of the 81st Commission Session of ESCAP. It is sponsored by the Government of Bangladesh and supported by discussants from Member States, civil society, ESCAP, UNDP, World Bank and others (TBC).

The one-hour-long dialogue will begin with a keynote speech or presentation to set the stage for the discussions, followed by an engaging dialogue and a closing session. The discussions will be interactive, with participants and other stakeholders invited to make their statements or ask questions, if time permits after the panelists' interventions.

B. Target Audience

- Government representatives from LDCs, emerging economies, and other countries in Asia and the Pacific.
- Urban planners, architects, and infrastructure experts working on sustainable cities.
- Academics and researchers focusing on urbanization, poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability.
- Private sector leaders engaged in urban infrastructure, clean energy, and technology innovation.
- Civil society organizations and development partners dedicated to promoting inclusive and sustainable urban development.

C. Program Outline

Time	Activity
13:15-13:25	Welcome remarks from Mr. Md. Shahriar Kader Siddiky, Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, ESCAP (TBC) Dr. Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, Special Assistant (State Minister), Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh
13:25-13:35	Keynote Presentation by Bangladesh Delegation 'Sustainable Urbanization through Three Zeros: Transforming the Cities of the Future'
13:35-14:00	Panel discussion, moderated by ESCAP • Ms. Somsook Boonyabancha, Chair, Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (TBC)

	• Mr. Elmar Mammadov, Head of Economic Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (TBC) • High-level Representatives from Cambodia (TBC) • Ms. Diana Torres, Regional Governance Advisor, UNDP (TBC) • Ms. Dao Harrison, Senior Housing Specialist, World Bank (TBC)
14:00-14:10	Open floor Discussion
14:10-14:15	**Wrap up and closing:** H.E. Mr. Faiyaz Murshid Kazi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bangkok

6. Conclusion

This event aims to inspire cities and countries across Asia and the Pacific to embrace participatory pathways for urban solutions, paving the way for more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable futures. The expected outcomes of the event are:

1. Good Practices Shared: Documentation and exchange of innovative housing models and participatory approaches from across the region.
2. Policy Recommendations: Actionable insights for integrating inclusive housing solutions into urban policies and strategies, particularly for LDCs preparing for graduation.
3. Strengthened Partnerships: Enhanced collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and regional actors to scale up inclusive housing initiatives.
4. Future Directions**:** Identification of synergies between housing solutions, climate adaptation, and resilience-building efforts to support sustainable urban development in alignment with the Three Zeros approach.