



STATEMENT

**His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K.,
President of the Republic of Mauritius**

**EVENT: SUMMIT MARKING THE OPENING OF THE 13TH
WORLD URBAN FORUM (WUF13)**

VENUE: PLENARY HALL, BAKU, REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

DATE: 18 MAY 2026

TIME: 15:50 AZT / MUT

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

All Protocol observed

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon, Bon Après Midi

Gunortaniz Xeyir / Salam

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start my address by thanking His Excellency, President Ilham Aliyev, the Hon. Prime Minister, the Government and people of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the kind invitation and the warm and cordial welcome and hospitality extended to me and to my delegation during this important Forum.

I would also like to convey to the organisers and all participants the warm and friendly greetings of the Government and People of the Republic of Mauritius.

Theme 2026

The theme before us: “Housing the World: Safe and Resilient Cities and Communities”, goes to the very heart of one of the most pressing challenges of our time.

We meet at the midpoint review of the New Urban Agenda, at a moment when nearly three billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing

conditions, 1 billion live in slums and informal settlements and 300 million lack any form of shelter.

Formidable Humanitarian Challenge

A formidable and unprecedented humanitarian challenge.

A challenge central to human dignity, social stability, and sustainable development.

This forum is therefore not only very timely but also very opportune for sharing experiences, knowledge and best practices to advance the agenda for the future of sustainable urban planning development.

Across the globe, cities are expanding at an unprecedented pace. Yet this growth is too often unplanned, unequal, and environmentally unsustainable.

Resulting in a widening gap between opportunity and reality - between the promise of urban life and the lived experience of millions.

Housing is today more than shelter. It is a basic human need and an essential human right.

The very foundation of inclusion, resilience, social justice and human dignity.

If we are to achieve sustainable human development, housing and urban planning must be at the centre of public policy.

Mauritius: A SIDS Perspective

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Mauritius - a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) where land is scarce, sea level rise is real, environmental risks and the pressures of urbanisation are increasingly visible

We fully support and are committed towards the realisation of the goals of this forum.

For us, planning is not an option; it is essential, it is existential.

To address this challenge, in November 2025, our Government approved a new National Development Strategy (NDS), which provides a people-centric, comprehensive, sustainable spatial framework for development **up to 2040, in line with the principles advocated by UN-Habitat** and the New Urban Agenda.

To ensure the optimal use of limited land resources, while balancing economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

A number of key measures have already been adopted and include:

- Expanding access to decent, safe, affordable and ecological housing for low- and middle-income families;
- Reserving a proportion of social housing units for Persons with Disabilities, Single Mothers and the Elderly;
- Encouraging integrated communities through better alignment of housing, public services, transport connectivity and economic opportunities.

At the same time, we are modernising land administration through the digitisation of land records to improve transparency, reduce disputes, prevent speculation and promote more equitable access to land.

Our National Development Strategy is therefore a guiding transition toward a more sustainable urban model where one that promotes balanced territorial development, efficient land use, improved connectivity and greater environmental stewardship and climate resilience.

For Mauritius, climate change is not a distant threat; it is a daily reality.

We are determined to build communities that are not only sustainable, but resilient by design.

Azerbaijan Initiatives

Here, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the 10-year comprehensive urban transformational initiatives of the Government and people of Azerbaijan, in particular:

The white city project, the master plan for the Aghdam City project of Karabakh and the implementation of the 2006 decree on Ecological measures under the dedicated and inspirational leadership of President Ilham Aliyev.

I have no doubt that these landmark initiatives will form an integral part of the reflections and discussions of the 13th WUF and will contribute meaningfully in enriching its conclusions and recommendations.

Today, we can also leverage intelligently and responsibly the huge potential of AI in re-imagining and redirecting urban eco-friendly and sustainable planning and development.

Challenges and Continuous Adaptation

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Are we on the right track?

We believe we are making meaningful progress. But we must also be fully aware of the challenges that remain.

Our collective experience so far therefore reinforces a simple but important lesson:

Urban planning is not a one-time exercise and should not be so; it is a continuous process of adaptation, inclusion, and innovation.

A Call for Global Action

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Small Island Developing States face unique constraints: limited land, high exposure to climate risks, and restricted financial and technical capacity.

One-size-fits-all solutions will not suffice.

We therefore call for stronger international support in key areas:

- **Innovative and accessible housing finance tailored to SIDS;**
- **Greater transfer of technology for resilient and low-carbon construction;**

- **Enhanced capacity building in integrated land-use planning and coastal management.**

Global solidarity **must** translate into practical, targeted support.

Conclusion

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The cities we build today will define the quality of life for future generations.

We must continue to innovate, to plan carefully, and to act responsibly.

Let us work together to ensure that our cities are not only engines of growth, but also spaces of inclusion, sustainability, and human dignity.

Mauritius stands ready to contribute to this collective effort.

My best wishes for a very productive and successful forum.

Thank you for your attention.