Launch of the Atlas for Afghan City Regions 2016

Wednesday 20th July, 2016, the Government of Afghanistan launched the 'Atlas of Afghan City Regions 2016' which presents a comprehensive and reliable urban dataset on Afghanistan's five main city regions, Jalalabad, Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and Kandahar regions as well as on 28 Strategic District Municipalities.

This atlas was developed as part of the Future of Afghan Cities programme (FoAC), implemented under the leadership of four government partners: Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MUDH), Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), Afghanistan's Independent Land Authority (ARAZI) and

From the left: Matthew French (Country Representative (a.i.) UN-Habitat), Srinivasa Popuri (Senior Human Settlements Officer, UN-Habitat), H.E. Jawad Peikar (ARAZI), H.E. Abdul Baqi Popal (IDLG) and H.E. Sadat Mansoor Nadri (MUDH).

Kabul Municipality (KM); with technical assistance from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and financial support from the Government of Australia and the Government of United Kingdom. FoAC is an extension of State of Afghan Cities programme (SoAC) 2014/15, which produced Afghanistan's first ever comprehensive urban dataset on all 34 provincial capital cities.

The Atlas of Afghan City Regions 2016 presents two key findings. **First, roughly one-third of the total Afghan populations live in these five main city regions**. This supports the National Unity Government's vision to better link urban areas with the urban-fringe, and the significance of these 'metropolitan' regions for the economic and social development of Afghanistan. H.E. Abdul Baqi Popal, Director General (a.i), Independent Directorate of Local Governance spoke on the need for metropolitan governance to manage these city regions:

 "The five city regions in this Atlas reflect the mandate of nearly one-third of all Provincial Governors; over 40 District Governors, 6 Provincial Mayors and 35 District Mayors: a considerable number of sub-national actors and offices. The Atlas shows the importance of improved coordination amongst these sub-national entities through a 'metropolitan' approach to governance"

Second, several of the district municipalities are in fact larger than many of the provincial municipalities in terms of land area and estimated population. As an example*,* H.E. Sadat Mansoor Naderi, Minister for Urban Development Housing pointed to the fact that Spin Boldak is the 13th largest city in the country, larger than over 20 provincial municipalities.

The data can be used to underpin decisions in investments, service delivery, security and better land management in Afghan cities. H.E. Sadat Mansoor Nadri, further emphasized the importance of the data in informing government programming and policy decisions in this speech during the launch:

"This programme has produced a valuable assessment of the five major Afghan City Regions, the data of which is presented in this Atlas. It provides a reliable and up-to-date dataset which MUDH and others will use for urban planning to guide the growth of urbanization in the coming decade. The data is already informing policy decisions and government programming, such as the 'Citizen Charter', 'City for All' and the 'Urban National Priority Programme'.

Speeches were delivered by FoAC government main partners. From left, H.E. Jawad Peikar (ARAZI), H.E. Abdul Baqi Popal (IDLG) and H.E. Sadat Mansoor Nadri (MUDH).

The Atlas and its dataset is a key part of the National Unity Government's commitment to fighting corruption and improving governance by providing information on land use and dwelling density in the urban areas of Afghanistan. A reliable dataset for the major city regions, including vacant plots and institutional properties, is a key tool to fight the grabbing of urban land and addressing past land grabbing infringements. In his speech, H.E. Jawad Peikar, CEO, Afghanistan's Independent Land Authority (ARAZI) said:

"Over the past few years ARAZI has increasingly prioritized urban land management and administration, including land registration, land disputes resolution and land tenure. This FoAC programme provides a rapid and useful assessment of existing land-use in the five major city regions, laying the foundations for more concerted action to manage the urban land in Afghanistan under the leadership of ARAZI."

Mr. Srinivasa Popuri, speaking on behalf of UN-Habitat's Regional Office in Asia and Pacific, pointed to the fact that Government's visionary initiatives like the State of Afghan Cities and the Future of Afghan Cities programmes provide quality baseline information for several ministries in Afghanistan to develop programs and policies with immense impact on urban policy and governance and for robust monitoring framework for sustainable development goals (SDGs).

In closing, Mr. Popuri remarked that Habitat III provides a global arena for the Afghanistan government to highlight the innovative and visionary urban programming that include SoAC

and FoAC programmes, which is leading Afghanistan towards their own '*New Urban Agenda*' through the Urban National Priority Programme (U-NPP)

The Atlas of Afghan City Region 2016 can be downloaded from the following link:
http://unhabitat.org/atlas-of-afghan-city-regions-2016/