

10 May, 2026



Faith Pavilion at WUF13

—Multi-Faith Call to Action on Housing

WUF13 /Housing the world: Safe and resilient cities and communities

Preamble

In the lead-up to the 13th World Urban Forum (WUF13), themed “*Housing the World: Safe and Resilient Cities and Communities*,” religious leaders, organizations, and individual actors from diverse faith traditions have come together to advance a shared moral vision and practical call to action addressing the global housing crisis. Convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and co-organized by the Government of Azerbaijan, WUF13 will convene in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 17–22 May 2026. As the world’s premier global gathering on sustainable urbanization, the Forum brings together governments, city leaders, civil society, business, planners, researchers, community organizations, and faith actors to address the most pressing urban challenges of our time.

Rooted in the conviction that every person possesses sacred and inherent dignity and deserves access to safe, secure, and affordable housing, this statement by the Faith Pavilion at WUF13 affirms the vital role faith communities can play in addressing the global housing crisis through collaboration, stewardship, justice, compassion, and informed action. We invite individuals and organizations around the world to read, endorse, and join this growing movement of faith leaders, communities, and partners mobilizing to help build the homes, communities, and systems necessary for human flourishing and the common good.

A Shared Moral Imperative

We, leaders and representatives of diverse faith traditions gathered at the Faith Pavilion at the 13th World Urban Forum (WUF13)—together with signatories and endorsers around the world who stand in solidarity with this declaration—affirm with one voice that adequate and affordable housing for all is a moral imperative and a just cause. Rooted in our shared conviction of the sacred worth of every person and the goodness of the living world entrusted to us, we believe that access to a safe, secure, affordable, and dignified home is not optional. It is essential.

Housing as a Foundation of Human Flourishing

We recognize that the provision of housing is an expression of divine love. In the wisdom of God, human dignity is inseparable from the places we inhabit. Homes are where life unfolds: where children are nurtured, relationships are formed, and communities take shape. From these foundations emerge societies, economies, and cultures. To deny housing is to diminish human flourishing. Securing housing for all upholds human dignity and enables communities to thrive.

Because housing is essential to human dignity and the common good, we affirm, in alignment with the UN Charter and international human rights law, that adequate housing is a human right.

Women, children and young people, older persons, and persons with disabilities are often among those most severely affected by housing deprivation and insecurity, as inadequate, insecure, or overcrowded housing profoundly limits healthy human development, mobility, education, caregiving, safety, and opportunity throughout life. Among the more than 1.1 billion people living in informal settlements globally, an estimated 350–500 million are children, yet their needs are too often overlooked in housing and urban policy. Unsafe structures, lack of play and learning spaces, insecure tenure, and exposure to environmental and social risks disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion across generations. Because housing is foundational to human dignity and flourishing, special attention must be given to the needs of the most vulnerable members of society.

Compelled by our religious traditions, which call us to recognize the sacred worth of every person, and by our shared civic ethical convictions, we commit to responding with compassion and intentional action to the lived realities of low-income and vulnerable households, particularly the more than 1.1 billion people living in informal settlements globally. We affirm that secure tenure, participatory upgrading, and the inclusive development of informal settlements and underserved neighborhoods are matters of justice, dignity, and human rights, not charity.

Ecologically Integrated Urban Development

Human flourishing is inseparable from the health of the land, oceans, waterways, and ecosystems upon which all life depends, as well as from the agrarian and fisheries systems that nourish humanity.

Achieving global commitments under the Rio Conventions—addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation—is dependent on integrated, place-based approaches that align conservation, regenerative land use, sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and human settlement patterns across the full nature-rural-urban continuum.

Housing and human settlements must be developed in ways that protect ecosystems, sustain livelihoods, and reduce exposure to climate-related and environmental risks that disproportionately affect vulnerable communities. Of special concern are children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, whose health, safety, mobility, development, and futures are often least able to withstand environmental harm and climate-related disruption. Ecological responsibility therefore requires the development of well-planned, well-serviced communities—from dense urban neighborhoods to rural villages—that strengthen resilience to climate-related risks such as flooding and extreme heat.

We further recognize the vital role of Indigenous communities, whose deep relationships with land and water, and whose traditional knowledge systems, offer enduring models of ecological stewardship and place-based living. At the same time, many Indigenous peoples face disproportionate exposure to environmental degradation, climate risks, and displacement. For Indigenous children and youth, housing rooted in land, culture, and community is essential to identity, continuity, belonging, and healing across generations. Housing and development strategies must therefore uphold Indigenous rights, respect land tenure and cultural practices, and be shaped through meaningful partnership, consent, and co-creation.

We recognize that coastal regions—home to roughly 40% of the global population and 12 of the world's 15 largest cities—as well as small island communities and settlements along rivers and wetlands, face intensifying threats from climate change. In these contexts, rising seas, storm surge, saltwater intrusion, and recurrent flooding increasingly threaten homes and livelihoods. Housing strategies must therefore integrate the protection and restoration of biodiversity-rich coastal and aquatic ecosystems—including mangroves, wetlands, reefs, and estuaries—as essential infrastructure supporting housing security, ecological integrity, and climate resilience.

We likewise recognize the growing pressures facing communities across terrestrial landscapes—including rural villages, farming regions, forest settlements, and dryland communities—where climate change and ecological degradation increasingly threaten homes, livelihoods, and food security. In these contexts, drought, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, wildfire, and water scarcity place growing pressure on both human settlements and ecosystems. Housing and development strategies must therefore integrate the protection and restoration of biodiversity-rich terrestrial ecosystems—including forests, soils, watersheds, grasslands, and agricultural lands—as essential infrastructure supporting housing security, ecological integrity, and climate resilience.

These ecological choices are not merely technical design issues; they are moral responsibilities, because they determine whether homes remain safe, affordable, and habitable over time.

A Holistic, Place-Based Vision Across the Nature-Rural-Urban Transect**

We call for a holistic, place-based vision of urban design and housing that recognizes the interconnectedness of human settlements and the living systems upon which they depend. Development must respect the full nature-rural-urban transect—from oceans, tidal zones, coasts, rivers, and wetlands to conserved lands, working landscapes, rural villages, towns, cities, and metropolitan regions. This transect affirms that human communities are embedded within both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Each zone has its own ecological character, cultural identity, and appropriate patterns of human life and livelihood, yet all are deeply interconnected and interdependent.

The form and pattern of human settlements across the nature-rural-urban transect profoundly shape quality of life, food security, and the resilience and vitality of local and regional economies. Fragmented, exclusionary, and environmentally degrading development patterns—whether urban sprawl that consumes farmland, degradation of coastal and marine ecosystems, extractive practices that damage landscapes and waters, or rural disinvestment that erodes livelihoods—undermine both human flourishing and ecological integrity. These patterns of development have too often resulted in the displacement and marginalization of Indigenous peoples and vulnerable communities.

We must instead build and steward places that conserve, protect, and restore ecosystems across land and water. This approach integrates conservation with regenerative, mixed-use design, and context-appropriate land use, and brings together agriculture, urban design, and architecture. It strengthens local economies, supports regenerative agrarian systems and sustainable fisheries, and fosters durable, inclusive communities across every transect zone.

Effective housing solutions must also recognize households and communities, including women, children and young people, as active agents—through incremental building, locally driven upgrading, secure tenure, access to finance, and essential services.

The goal is to create places that are human-scale, walkable, connected, inclusive, safe, productive, healthy, beautiful, just, resilient, culturally rooted, and ecologically sustainable—places that foster human flourishing.

Contributing to this vision is the recognition and upholding of the rights, knowledge, and leadership of Indigenous communities, whose relationships to land, water, and place embody enduring traditions of stewardship and belonging. Housing and development approaches must respect Indigenous land tenure, cultural practices, and self-determination, and be shaped through meaningful partnership and consent.

Relational Infrastructure and the Deeper Metacrisis

We recognize that the global housing crisis is not a discrete problem, but a manifestation of a wider convergence of interrelated crises—spiritual, moral, social, economic, ecological, and institutional—that together constitute a broader metacrisis. The strain within housing systems reveals deeper fractures in trust, weakening social bonds, and a diminished capacity to act collectively for the common good. These crises do not operate in isolation; they interact and reinforce one another, compounding vulnerability and eroding long-term resilience.

Responding to this reality requires more than policy reform or financial innovation alone. It calls for the deliberate strengthening of relational infrastructure—trust, social cohesion, and shared responsibility, so that communities are better able to face complexity, rebuild stability, and sustain a durable and inclusive common life. Relational infrastructure takes practical form through community organizations, savings groups, faith congregations, neighborhood associations, participatory planning processes, and other forms of caregiving, community-building, and organizing work—often led by women—that enable collective action, accountability, and long-term stewardship of housing and land. Religious communities and other social institutions have a vital role to play in this work. Through their long-standing presence, moral vision, and solidarity with Indigenous peoples and with the poor and vulnerable, as well as their deeply embedded relationships, religious organizations can cultivate trust, foster belonging, and mobilize people, land, and resources to bridge divides and unlock collaborative solutions. By anchoring action in shared values and sustaining commitments over time, they help restore the social foundations upon which equitable and enduring housing solutions depend.

An Invitation and a Challenge to Public Institutions

To the United Nations, national and local governments, and development and philanthropic institutions:

- > We urge you to more fully recognize and engage faith-based organizations as essential partners in addressing the housing crisis.

For millennia, faith communities have helped shape neighborhoods, towns, and cities. This is not a new concern, but a longstanding expression of religious life: caring for the vulnerable, forming communities, and stewarding land and resources for the common good. Today, faith communities remain among the largest and most trusted local actors in the world. They continue to steward significant land and assets, mobilize people and capital, and sustain a long-term presence in communities where others often cannot. Yet their contributions remain under-integrated in policy frameworks and implementation strategies. A more effective response requires their meaningful inclusion, not as symbolic participants, but as co-creators of solutions.

A Call to the Private Sector and Financial Institutions

To the private sector and financial institutions:

- > We call for a reorientation of investment toward housing models that prioritize long-term affordability, community stability, and ecological and social sustainability. Markets must serve people and the common good.

This includes supporting circular economy approaches that minimize waste, advance reuse and refurbishment, improve resource efficiency, encourage the use of locally available materials, and foster more regenerative patterns of housing development and construction.

Housing policies, financing, and design must prioritize gender-responsive, child-centred and youth-inclusive approaches, ensuring safety, accessibility, participation, and long-term affordability.

We invite the development of innovative public-private-faith partnerships that mobilize the full range of faith capital—including patient capital, land, buildings, trusted community relationships, volunteer networks, moral leadership, and long-term institutional presence—alongside public investment, private capital, and philanthropic resources. Together, these partnerships can reduce risk, unlock land, expand affordability, invest in place-based design, and support long-term community stewardship, resilience, and flourishing. By integrating financial capacity with the trust, local presence, and enduring commitments of faith communities, these partnerships can help deliver housing at scale while advancing long-term social, ecological, and economic resilience.

A Call to Faith Communities Themselves

And to ourselves—faith leaders, institutions, and communities:

- > We acknowledge that we have not fully realized the potential of the assets entrusted to us. Too often, land remains underutilized, partnerships underdeveloped, and our collective voice under-exercised. We are called to do more. We must bring forward our land, our capital, our relationships, and our moral vision in ways that are practical, collaborative, and scalable. We must also listen, learn, and work across traditions and sectors with humility and resolve.

Where faith communities are advancing innovative and dignified approaches to housing, we commit to identifying, documenting, celebrating, strengthening, replicating, and scaling these models in contextually appropriate ways.

We acknowledge with humility that religious communities and institutions have not always lived up to their values and principles. Where we have fallen short, we seek forgiveness, commit to learning from our mistakes, and strive to more fully embody the best of our traditions in service of all people. We also recognize legitimate concerns surrounding religious nationalism. We reject any use of religion to justify exclusion, coercion, domination, or violence, and instead affirm a vision of faith rooted in humble service, principled pluralism, the protection of human dignity and rights for all, and active peacemaking across differences for the common good.

A Shared Agenda for Action

Therefore, we commit to advancing a shared agenda of action:

- > **We will advocate** for housing as a foundational pillar of inclusive, resilient, and flourishing communities across the nature-rural-urban continuum.
- > **We will mobilize** faith-based land, resources, and institutional capacity for the development of affordable, community-serving, and ecologically responsible housing.
- > **We will support** housing systems that advance and ensure long-term affordability through inclusive land-use policies, accessible financing, secure tenure, and protections for vulnerable households.
- > **We will support** design that advances housing, intentional placemaking, human-scale development, walkability, connectivity, inclusion, beauty, resilience, cultural rootedness, and ecological sustainability, fostering places where people and nature can flourish together.
- > **We will work** to prevent displacement and homelessness, especially among the most vulnerable.
- > **We will elevate** the voices of communities most affected, ensuring they are not only served, but heard, empowered, and included in shaping the future of their communities.
- > **We will strengthen** partnerships across sectors, recognizing that no single actor can meet this challenge alone.
- > **We will advocate** for and support the creation of financial institutions and innovative funding mechanisms dedicated to mobilizing resources for faith-driven housing interventions, solutions, and innovations.

- > **We will advocate** that schools of religion and theological education institutions integrate learning about faith, land, and property into their curricula. This includes stewardship of faith-owned land and buildings, housing and property development, urban design, and the relationship between placemaking and human flourishing. This will help equip emerging leaders to connect faith with housing justice, understand spatial and environmental inequities, and cultivate the skills, imagination, and moral vision necessary to advance concrete faith-led housing and placemaking solutions.

A Pivotal Moment for Shared Responsibility

The housing decisions we make today will shape the world inherited by children and young people tomorrow. As the global community gathers in Baku at this pivotal moment, we affirm that addressing the housing crisis requires more than incremental change; it requires a transformation in how we think, build, and live together. It requires aligning our systems with our values, and our actions with our deepest convictions.

We stand ready to contribute—faithfully, constructively, and collaboratively—to the work ahead.***

If you would like to endorse this statement as an individual, or on behalf of an organization, please click this [link](https://www.faithforcities.org/faith-pavilion-call-to-action-wuf13)

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** The Center for Applied Transect Studies is a good resource to learn about urban transect theory <https://transect.org/>

*** This statement is intended as a living document—one that will continue to be refined through ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and shared learning among the stakeholders and partners engaged in this Call to Action. As we deepen our understanding, listen to affected communities, and learn from practice and experience, we expect this statement to evolve, be refined, and grow over time. It reflects our best collective discernment at this moment as we seek to faithfully live out the highest values and teachings of our respective faith traditions, while continuing to pursue more just, inclusive, and life-giving housing systems for all.