



ASSOCIATION  
INTERNATIONALE DES TUNNELS  
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**ITA News Press Release – Nov 2024**

**ITA ITACUS participation at the 12<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum of UN-Habitat November 2024**

## Facing the challenges of exponential urbanisation

Pressing issues of urban daily life, from ease of commuting to security of the water supply; access to safe public spaces to the impacts of climate change; rapid expansion of urban areas to protections against pollution, these were among the wide-ranging issues under discussion at the **World Urban Forum** of the United Nations UN-Habitat agency last week in Cairo (4-8 November 2024). As part of the conversations, the ITA, International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association, and ITACUS its Committee on Underground Space, attended the proceedings and with a booth in the Urban Expo on a

mission to raise the profile of underground urban spaces and infrastructure in tackling these immense and in some cases overwhelming challenges.



*ITA mission at WUF was to raise awareness of the often missing but important underground dimension*

From the booth, the ITA/ITACUS team engaged with visitors from across the globe to broaden awareness of how the underground dimension is equally as important as ground up urbanisation. Under its booth theme ***Elevated Thinking Underground: Building a Climate-Resilient, Sustainable Urban Future***, ITA and ITACUS representatives advocated the transformative potential of subterranean urbanism in creating resilient cities with minimised long-term maintenance and operational costs.

For the ITA/ITACUS team, it was a concern how little reference there was to underground urbanism and infrastructure. The logo of the event itself implied that urbanisation exists from the ground surface up with nothing from ground surface down, when we know that for all that can be seen on the surface, there is a world of underground infrastructure on which all cities and urban societies are founded and sustained. In all discussions at the booths they visited and in all the workshops and groups they joined, the ITA/ITACUS representatives, including **ITA Past President Jinxiu Jenny Yan**, **ITACUS Chair Antonia Cornaro** and **ITACUS Steering Board members Petr Salak and Abidemi Agwor**, and a member of the ITA Media team, added the underground perspective to the discussions, and opened up ideas and prospects that other group-members confessed they hadn't thought of before.

Among the more than 25,000 participants at WUF12 from 182 countries, (in-person and online) ITA and ITACUS connected with senior statesmen, policy leaders and friends of ITA who know of the importance of the underground dimension and advocate of its inclusion in urgent urbanisation considerations.



**Visitors welcomed to the ITA booth by ITACUS Chair, Antonia Cornaro (centre)**



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**Michal Mlynár**, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations made a personal visit to the ITA booth after giving a keynote address as Acting Executive Director of UN-Habitat when he joined the ITA and at the World Tunnel Congress (WTC) in May 2024 in Shenzhen, China.<sup>[1]</sup>

ITA Past President Jinxiu Jenny Yan met with **Minister Ni Hong**, Minister of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the People's Republic of China, who was also an honoured guest speaker at WTC2024 in Shenzhen and gave a keynote to the Opening Ceremony plenary session, describing how China's investment in underground infrastructure has improved the lives of millions across the country and how his Ministry is facing the real challenges of urban and rural social development.<sup>[1]</sup>

A good friend of ITA and head of the Egyptian Member Nation Tunnelling Society, **Dr Ashraf Abu Kriahna**, visited the booth and with him the head of Cairo transport. With a population of more than 10 million, and beyond the vital need for water supply and sewerage networks, the greatest use of Cairo's subsurface is for the Cairo Metro. Started in the 1980s, the current operating system of three lines totals more than 80km of which significant lengths are underground, including under the great River Nile, first in open-cut works and then in TBM bored running tunnels between open cut stations. Line 4 with long lengths of TBM running tunnels is under construction and Lines 5 and 6 are in the planning and feasibility stages.

For visitors to Cairo, the need for public transportation services is evident, as it is in so many rapidly expanding cities of the world. Traffic congestion and the pollution it generates is a major concern and the solutions for transportation to new parts of the city are 10 and 12 lane highways including many on long elevated structures. An elevated monorail is the solution for public transport to New Cairo and other new developments including the new capital of Egypt about 50km to the east of Cairo. The need for stormwater management in the new area of Cairo at site of the new exhibition centre venue of the 12<sup>th</sup> staging of the World Urban Forum came on Monday afternoon when a torrential and unseasonal rainstorm flooded the wide acres of paved areas. Accumulated stormwater had to be swept away before dignitaries arrived for the WUF opening ceremony.



**Visit by Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Michal Mlynár to the ITA booth with Abidemi Agwor (left) and Petr Salak (right)**



**Visit by the Egyptian Tunnelling Society from left: ITACUS Chair Antonia Cornaro, Dr Ashraf Abu Kriahna of ETS, ITA Past President Jinxiu Jenny Yan, head of Cairo Metro, and Abidemi Agwor of ITACUS**





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Another observation of visitors to the WUF exhibition, was the powerful use of very cold air conditioning in the venue halls, so cold that regular trips outside were needed to warm up, and coats and scarfs had to be worn to stay comfortable inside. The expenditure of energy to maintain the very low temperatures across five large halls and associated buildings will have been highly expensive and in the long term non-sustainable.

In all the public addresses, the plight of the dispossessed, displaced and vulnerable in urban developments across the world was a constant focus as was the disparity between first and third world communities and those suffering urban destruction through natural disasters and violent conflict. At the Opening Ceremony, <sup>[2]</sup> **Anacláudia Rossbach, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)**, promised to listen to diverse stakeholders and tackle key issues of how to ensure affordable housing for all, transform informal settlements, recover and rebuild destroyed cities, and enhance climate resilience. “We need to build strong coalitions for better solutions to challenges posed by the global housing crisis,” she said.

In a video address to the Opening Ceremony, **UN Secretary-General António Guterres** spoke of the new pact among nations to advance the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and specifically address inequalities and the world’s critical shortage of housing. <sup>[2]</sup>

**President el-Sisi of Egypt** and his special guests **President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas** and the **Presidents of Yemen and Sudan**, were present in person and each addressed the Opening Ceremony. <sup>[2]</sup>

A highlight of the WUF proceedings was the launch of the UN-Habitat flagship **World Cities Report 2024 entitled Cities and Climate Action**. The 373-page report provides a wide and far-reaching analysis of the current and expected climate impacts on different regions and cities, as well as the differing vulnerabilities urban populations face as a result of poverty, inequality, ethnicity, gender, disability and other characteristics. The report focuses on the fact that cities are both victims of climate change and among its worst perpetrators and that there is not only a moral imperative to promote low-carbon, sustainable urbanisation, but also a compelling logic with already progressive solutions emerging from cities to strength their collective resilience. <sup>[3]</sup>

After a full week of engagement, the official Closing Ceremony <sup>[4]</sup> celebrated the outcomes and achievements of the WUF12 and concluded with the official handover to the hosts of WUF13 which will be hosted in 2026 in Baku, Azerbaijan. ITA and ITACUS plan again to be at WUF13 and invite others in our community to join us. The ITA booth in Cairo was made possible with the grateful financial contributions of our booth sponsors – Herrenknecht, SIKA, Amberg Engineering, HNTB, CREC and sister association ACUUS, Associated Research Centers for the Urban Underground Space. To become part of the effort at WUF13 in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2026, please coordinate with Antonia Cornaro, Chair of ITACUS at [acornaro@amberg.ch](mailto:acornaro@amberg.ch).

There is much to do to elevate awareness of the underground in the minds of urban planners, architects, local politicians, and community leaders in tackling the urban challenges we face. Let the work continue!

## References and links

ITA-AITES - <https://www.ita-aites.org/>

ITACUS - <https://about.ita-aites.org/wg-committees/itacus>

1. WTC2024 highlights report - <https://about.ita-aites.org/files/ITA-WTC2024-China-Roundup-Press-Release.pdf>

World Urban Forum 12 website of Proceedings - <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/wuf12>



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2. World Urban Forum 12 Opening Ceremony – Monday, 4 Nov 2024

<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1n/k1nntfttk>

3. UN-Habitat World Cities Report 2024 - Cities and Climate Action

<https://unhabitat.org/world-cities-report-2024-cities-and-climate-action>

4. World Urban Forum 12 Closing Ceremony – Friday, 8 Nov 2024 <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k15/k15l948uyq>

#### **ITA-ITACUS WUF12 Booth sponsors**

Herrenknecht - <https://www.herrenknecht.com/en/>

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HNTB - <https://www.hntb.com/>

CREC - <https://www.crecg.com/zgzywz/10198608/index.html>

ACUUS - [https://www.acuus.org/about\\_us/](https://www.acuus.org/about_us/)

#### **Images (attached) and captions**

Photo 1 – WUF12 Cairo logo

Photo 2 – Visitors to the ITA booth at WUF12

Photo 3 – ITA visit with Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Michal Mlynár

Photo 4 – Visit to the ITA booth by the Egyptian Tunnelling Society

#### **For more details please contact**

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