

World Habitat Day 2020
5 October 2020

Executive Secretary Opening Statement

Global Observance of World Habitat Day
Surabaya, Indonesia

His Excellency, Mr. Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia,

His Excellency Mochamad Basuki Hadimuljono, Minister of Public Works and Housing, Government of Indonesia,

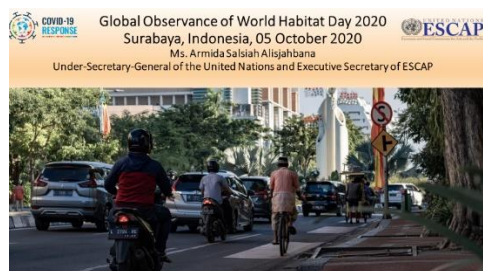
Ms. Tri Rismaharini, Honourable Mayor of Surabaya,

Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of UN-Habitat,

Distinguished delegates,

It is a pleasure to join you virtually from Bangkok for the global observance of World Habitat Day in 2020. I am delighted to be with you alongside partners from UN Habitat and the Ministry of Public Works and Housing of Indonesia.

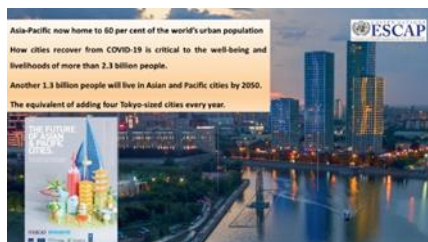
(SLIDE 1)



These are partnerships we value greatly at ESCAP. Not only to make this annual commemoration possible, but to give our collective work the breadth and depth needed to shape practical policy solutions for sustainable cities and human settlements in the region.

As emphasized by the UN Secretary General in his recent policy brief, *COVID-19 in an Urban World*, urban solutions are vital as countries respond to and recover from the pandemic.

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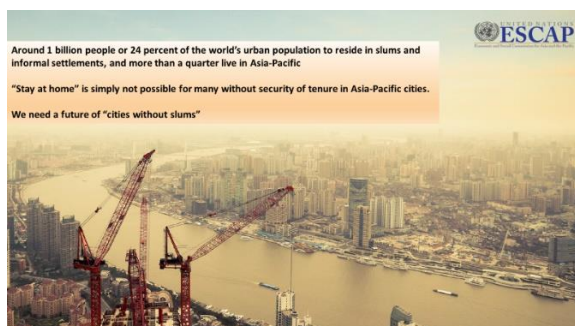
In line with local imperatives for COVID-19 recovery, cities play an essential role in delivering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As highlighted in the ESCAP-UN-Habitat *Future of Asian and Pacific Cities Report*, 2019 was a historical moment when the region's population became majority urban. We are now home to 60 per cent of the world's urban population, so how cities recover is critical to the well-being and livelihoods of more than 2.3 billion people.

And another 1.3 billion people will live in Asian and Pacific cities by 2050. That is the equivalent of adding four Tokyo-sized cities every year!

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

The theme for this year is *Housing For All: A better Urban Future*. Especially in the aftermath of the pandemic we must ensure that this ambition is achieved. Adequate shelter and housing for all is essential if we are to build resilient and inclusive cities.

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Let us remember that the global urban housing crisis forces around 1 billion people or 24 percent of the world’s urban population to reside in slums and informal settlements, and more than a quarter live in Asia-Pacific. Exacerbating the impact of pandemics such as COVID-19, the urban poor-- with limited or no income during lockdowns-- in many countries face risk of eviction, while overcrowding in low-quality housing increases the risk of rapid transmission. “Stay at home” is simply not possible for many without security of tenure in Asia-Pacific cities.

To realize a future vision of “cities without slums” we need to make large-scale public investments in affordable and adequate housing and slum upgrading to ensure that marginalized groups have access to shelter that facilitates physical and mental health during the pandemic and beyond. Future-proof housing investments need to also ensure extension of basic urban services such as adequate water, waste management and sanitation coverage.

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COVID-19 has not only had knock-on effects in how we address access to affordable housing, but also on essential urban services which make our cities liveable communities. Monumental challenges many cities are struggling with are the huge increases in plastic waste from food delivery and takeaways as well as personal protective equipment. In Thailand for example, the pandemic and lockdown has led to a huge rise in the country's plastic waste.

In this light, it is imperative that I revisit with you the progress in implementing the 2019 call of World Habitat Day which focused on the theme of ‘frontier technologies as an innovative tool to transform waste to wealth.’

Every year, 8 million tonnes of plastic materials enter our oceans. Cities in South East Asia contribute to over half of it. Much of this is used for around 10 minutes, and take up to a millennium to degrade in the environment if uncollected.

Indonesia was estimated to be the world’s second-largest contributor of plastic pollutant in the oceans after China, but has taken action and committed to reduce ocean-bound plastic waste by 70% by 2025 by reducing usage, increasing recycling and raising public awareness.

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Urban areas produce more waste than rural areas, and Asian cities are on the front line as they are forecasted to generate 1.8 billion tonnes of waste in 2025. The plastic waste most likely to enter the oceans is generated by populations living within 50 km of the coast.

If no transformational solutions are implemented, the amount of plastic debris entering the ocean could triple within three decades. We need to support cities in their war on waste, especially now with the increase in plastic use from COVID-19.

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To tackle this problem, ESCAP, supported by the Government of Japan following the G20 Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, and ASEAN are undertaking an innovative project named ‘Closing the Loop’, to mobilize local and regional governments towards action on plastic waste.

Closing the Loop promotes moving from a linear economy to a circular economy when it comes to plastics, which are too valuable to waste, and too harmful to our marine ecosystems. This is even more important now with the effects of COVID-19.

The ‘Closing the Loop’ project takes an innovation-led, solution-based approach to leverage space applications in a new digital tool to help local and regional governments monitor and visualize plastic waste leakages and to map waste hot spots. By applying smart city solutions such as these, we can help cities identify and eliminate plastic pollution hot spots in a cost-effective manner.

Four pilot cities from ASEAN joined the project-- one of them is our host today, Surabaya, Indonesia-- alongside Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Nakhon Si Thammarat in Thailand, and Da Nang in Viet Nam.

Surabaya has an ambitious target of becoming free of plastic waste by next year. In 2018, Surabaya developed a creative way for residents to recycle waste: by giving free bus rides in exchange for plastic waste. A two-hour bus ticket costs 10 plastic cups or up to 5 plastic bottles. After collection, plastic waste is auctioned off to recycling companies.

In Da Nang, Viet Nam where plastic waste is known as “white pollution”, up to 60% of waste generating households and businesses lie within 500 meters from waterways. With our support each of the project cities will apply innovative solutions to manage and recycle single use plastic in the city.

The lessons learned from the project will be shared through city-to-city and region-to-region exchanges, as well as in the next Asia Pacific Day for the Ocean hosted by ESCAP, to encourage more and more leaders internationally to develop innovative approaches to local plastic waste management.

In summary, solutions to the increasing plastic waste challenge in our cities are continually needed as part of building back better from COVID-19.

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Ladies and Gentleman,

We hope that similar solutions can be achieved this year under the new theme of ‘Housing for All’. ESCAP’s role is to drive regional cooperation and strong partnerships which are needed to bring sustainable solutions to all cities.

(SLIDE 8)



Together, we can lay the foundations for safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities and take sustainable urban development a step further in Asia and the Pacific.

I would like to wish you all a successful World Habitat Day.