



**Excellencies,**

**Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen,**

A week ago, we reached an 'agonising' milestone of 1 Million COVID-19 Deaths, as stated by the UN Secretary-General.

The world won't be the same after this pandemic. It is predicted that the way we will interact, work, play and rest will drastically change. The instruments to overcome the crisis will also change. The status quo we knew is gone, and a new reality is in place. This reality has compelled us to adopt new habits and unfamiliar choices for our communities and cities around the world.

We have witnessed the fragility of our communities and cities; we have observed even more glaringly the inequalities and unevenness of resource allocation for sustainable development.

Although the possible outcome scenarios, and the scope of these impacts are yet to be assessed, it is clear that job markets, the economy at large, the use of the social and physical space have been negatively affected, creating a world of uncertainty that calls for a rapid assessment and adaptation.

The pandemic is a local and global crisis. Urban areas have become the epicentre of the pandemic, as our Secretary-General has indicated in his Policy Brief on COVID-19 in an Urban World, for which UN-Habitat was the penholder.

Cities, particularly large agglomerations, played a role in the initial spread of the infection. However, they are also part of the solution, facilitating a response to the pandemic. They can be extremely important providing solutions in rural settings.



Cities are at the frontline of this crisis, and they would continue to be, in the future when medium- and long-term responses will be implemented.

The pandemic is teaching us important lessons.

First of all, health and epidemiological studies reveal to us a sort of hidden truth. No country is fully prepared for epidemics or pandemics, and every country has important gaps to address in this regard.

Secondly, Governments were unprepared to respond to this crisis. Particularly those with reduced funding for education and health, public facilities and institutions, basic services and essential subsidies. These governments will be compelled to come back to the drawing board of central and local government dialogues, and state and society relations.

Thirdly, private sector and markets alone, cannot respond to the crisis and global supply chains are far from resilient. COVID-19 has disrupted the global economy. Demand, supply and finance have been deeply affected. Trade and value-chains have been disrupted; the propensity to consume will decrease and global FDI will collapse, including a reversal in international investments in emerging markets.

As a consequence, the numbers of unemployed people are growing in an unprecedented manner. Poverty and inequality are increasing. Mortality of women and children will increase. GDP growth will be drastically reduced. Education is being interrupted.

In short, the realisation of SDGs is seriously affected.

We need to do everything possible to reverse this situation. At the end of this month, during the celebration of World Cities Day, UN-Habitat will launch the World Cities Report 2020 on the value of urbanization.



This report makes the case for cities, to remain central in the pursuit of sustainability, especially in these difficult times.

The Report also highlights that, the New Urban Agenda and SDGs are both timely and relevant, to fundamentally reform planning, policies, strategies, and budgets for cities to create value. This value touches in the economic, social, environmental and intangible conditions.

It touches on:

- (a) Governance;
- (b) political; cultural and civic perception; and,
- (c) outcomes that are needed to improve quality of life of residents in tangible ways.

Understanding the value of urbanization, advocating for new healthy habits, and managing appropriate responses is part of our strategy for the new normal.

When putting in place medium- to long-term responses, it is important to reflect on the nature and effectiveness of the systems of governance; not just to address health conditions, but more broadly the governance of a more complex society.

We have spent some time reflecting on what kind of ‘social contract’ the 21<sup>st</sup> century state would need, and how would local authorities be factored in.

Effective recovery systems and possible new pandemic responses require a whole-of-government and whole-of society approach, with resources and clear collaborative mechanisms and capacities.

At the outset of this pandemic UN-Habitat had been supporting several communities, cities and countries.



We have been working with local authorities and citizens to deliver essential services; we have been assisting with the development disaster risk management plans; and the strengthening crisis management and response.

–These are particularly important when it comes to informal settlements and slums where communities are most at risk of high infection rates, due to overcrowding, lack of basic services and medical facilities. Beyond immediate actions and containment policies, we are gearing up for medium-to-long term interventions.

Our *State of the World's Cities Report: Living with Pandemics* will be most timely. The proposed report serves as both an important study of the COVID-19 response from an urban perspective, and enables the international community to formulate concrete solutions.

Mr. Eduardo Moreno, our Chief of the Knowledge and Innovation Branch, will deliver a keynote address on the initial findings of the Report.

If I may, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to highlight the significant role that the Government of Norway is playing, in support of multilateral systems. I would like to thank Habitat Norway, and the Ministry of Modernisation and Local Government, for their timely and generous support to the organization of this event and the active role that the Ministry is playing in the policy dialogue on human settlements.

The COVID-19 pandemic gives us the unique opportunity to re-imagine the city. I look forward to an engaging dialogue on COVID-19 and cities, in particular in the promotion of sustainable solutions and transformative ideas. It is our hope that we can continue forging a creative alliance towards sustainable, less polluting and less resource-consuming activities, with a strong emphasis on human security and well-being.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.