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**Statement**

**by**

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**at**

**2023 Forum of Mayors**

**Geneva, 2 October 2023**



**FORUM OF  
MAYORS  
2023**



Excellencies,

Dear Mayors,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Happy World Habitat Day!

- I am honored to extend a warm welcome to each one of you as we embark on UNECE's Urban Resilience Week, starting today with the 2023 Forum of Mayors, which will be followed on Wednesday by the 84<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management and is organized to support and celebrate World Habitat Day and the Urban October.
- It is hard to overstate the importance of urban resilience. In the UNECE region, approximately 75% of the population already live in urban environments and this trend is increasing. Cities confront a multitude of challenges, with the climate crisis looming large as one of the most urgent. Whether it is excess mortality from urban heating and air pollution, increasingly frequent floods and other natural disasters, or climate-induced rural flight, cities are on the front line of dealing with the most pressing issues of our time.
- It is also true, however, that cities, as autonomous, democratic and locally minded organisations, have been and continue to be pioneers in developing innovative and effective solutions, mitigations and adaptations to these most difficult of problems.
- It is our pleasure that in this Third Forum of Mayors, more than 60 cities

from the UNECE region and beyond, have come together to discuss their experiences of Urban Regeneration. We will hear from 45 of them in the coming two days.

- We are delighted to announce also that this year we have organised an interregional segment, a testament to our commitment to global multilateralism. In cooperation with the other four Regional Economic and Social Commissions of the United Nations and the Global Cities Hub, we welcome cities from the UNECE region and beyond to Geneva to share their best practises and experience. This underscores the importance of diverse perspectives and cooperation in our quest for progress.
- The theme of this year's Forum is Urban Regeneration. Urban regeneration projects address many of the key challenges and goals related to sustainable development in urban areas, contributing to achieving SDG progress at the local level.
- SDG progress is also key to the fourth Segment of the Forum, specifically dedicated to Voluntary Local Reviews and City Profiles measuring cities' advancements towards the 2030 Agenda. The VLR-VNR studio event taking place tomorrow evening will continue the relevant discussions.
- UNECE has strong working practice in localizing the 2030 Agenda. To accelerate the implementation of the SDGs at local level, we produced Regional Guidelines for the SDG Voluntary Local Reviews, and provide

policy advice and technical assistance to cities in developing their VLRs according to the regional VLR guidelines. For instance, in 2022-2024, jointly with UN-Habitat, we are implementing a UN Development Account project to provide technical assistance to four cities (these are Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Tbilisi, Georgia; Nis, Serbia; and Dushanbe, Tajikistan) in implementing the Regional Guidelines and developing VLRs. Moreover, we promote an integrated approach to planning and building smart sustainable cities and urban settlements, as we support the secretariat of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities initiative and produce Smart Sustainable Cities Profiles.

- Since 2019, UNECE has also been a driving force behind nature-based solutions in cities, with urban actions around food, low-carbon construction, trees, and forests. UNECE's Trees in Cities Challenge, where more than 80 cities have pledged over 12.2 million trees, calls upon mayors and local governments to commit to tree planting for greener, cooler, healthier, and climate-resilient urban environments. Let me take this opportunity to invite you, the cities present in this Forum, to join our growing Trees in Cities community and become part of a climate- and future-proof solution for sustainable and more liveable cities.
  - Since April 2022, UNECE has been at the forefront of urban resilience efforts in Kharkiv and Mykolaiv. These initiatives involve the development of comprehensive master plans for both cities, driven by a request from the Ukrainian Ministry for Communities and Territories
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Development. Today, these master plans are not just visions but actionable blueprints, complete with ideas for specific pilot projects. Through the UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv Task Forces, UNECE serves as a pivotal link, coordinating efforts among UN agencies, international organizations, and experts, fostering collective support for the cities' reconstruction plans. Join us on 6 October morning here to hear about the progress of our UN4UkrainianCities activities.

- I look forward to hearing the interesting and diverse experiences of the cities present over the next two days.
  - Let me also draw your attention to a specific item on the agenda of the second day: Approval of the Recommendations of the Forum of Mayors.
  - This document was drawn up by the cities participating in the Forum of Mayors. It contains, for the first time, recommendations from Mayors to member States themselves, to be adopted at the 84<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management on Wednesday.
  - One of the most pressing of the recommendations is the request from Mayors to be more actively involved in the work of the United Nations, reflecting well the need for a reinvigorated, enlarged and new multilateralism.
  - Ultimately, the Forum of Mayors is an important first step towards the full integration of local actors into the work of the UN. In times of
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increased uncertainty and instability, the resilience of local communities and their willingness to work together to achieve real and lasting sustainable change cannot be overstated. It is crucial to nurture and support such cooperation.

- I hope that this event will be fruitful in this way, as both as an official place for Mayors to interact and share experiences within the UN setting but also as an informal platform, facilitating bilateral and multilateral cooperation, partnerships and exchanges to achieve sustainable development the UNECE region.
  - Last but not least, I would like to thank the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Italy for providing financial support to the Forum. Without their resources this would not have been possible.
  - Thank you.
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