



**Remarks by Mr. Michael Møller  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva  
UNECE 68th Commission Session - High-level Segment  
*“Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”***

**Tuesday, 09 April 2019 at 10.00  
Room XVIII, Palais des Nations**

**Executive Secretary,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is a pleasure to join you for the opening of the 68<sup>th</sup> Commission Session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.**

**Taking a step back for a moment, the very fact that our discussion is focused on “cities” strikes me as a revealing sign of just how much multilateralism has changed.**

**When I joined the UN forty years ago, the vast majority of our interactions - indeed the very nature of international affairs - were all squarely focused on national governments.**

**Now contrast this with today’s picture of global affairs. The world stage is much more crowded; and power is much more diffuse. Civil society and the private sector are obvious examples. And in more and more countries, mayors can at times be as influential in driving global policy as prime ministers or presidents.**

**If this complex polycentric system can at times be challenging to navigate, it also holds tremendous opportunities.**

**Opportunities that come into sharp focus when we think about how to make the 2030 Agenda a reality.**

**Put bluntly, the old way of doing business won't cut it. Governments alone cannot achieve the SDGs. We need everyone's involvement - from presidents to CEOs; from citizens to, crucially, mayors.**

**Mayors are closer to the people they serve and oftentimes better at feeling the pulse of their concerns than heads of governments.**

**All over the world, cities and local communities are trailblazers for the 2030 Agenda.**

**Against rigid hierarchies, they practice flexible, horizontal approaches; against top-down imposition they showcase what Benjamin Barber once called “democratic glocalism.”**

**The concentration of people has always made cities engines of innovation: The Renaissance started in Florence; and it was in Birmingham that the Industrial Revolution took off.**

**This makes sense: innovation speeds up because people are personally connected to each other, and because cities are gateways to finance, markets and other things that spur economic and cultural growth.**

**Four years since adopting the 2030 Agenda, our sight is firmly set on implementation. And while the scope of the Goals is global, implementation happens on the ground, that is to say, it happens locally.**

**But let us be clear minded about the “power” of cities. They can accelerate results, and often do; but just as they can magnify how policies can go really right, they can also amplify how they can go terribly wrong. Cities only work if a holistic approach is taken and no one is left behind.**

**Challenges come in different shapes and sizes depending on the local context, but they are all captured by the SDGs - whether it's urban infrastructure investment, or transport, or the provision of health services.**

**In closing, let me commend UNECE for putting together what promises to be engaging, insightful two days of discussions. I say this often, but it is great to see it put into practice: Just as we are improving horizontal collaboration across civil society, the private and public sectors, we also need to integrate along the vertical axis from grassroots to the global level - and cities are a key link in that chain.**

**I wish you every success.**

**Thank you.**