



**Live Learning Series hosted by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat
Mobility (2nd Thematic Session)**

**Speech by the UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Wednesday 8 April 2020**

Ladies and Gentlemen, City Leaders,

It is my pleasure to meet many of you again in this third live learning meeting hosted by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat, where we listen to cities which are living through the pandemic. I am grateful that we can meet. I am also deeply saddened about the increasing loss of life and the suffering in families affected by Covid-19.

The impact on the lives and livelihoods of so many, especially the poorest, is becoming immense.

It is precisely two months ago that I addressed in person many of you. We were with 15,000 participants at the opening of the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi.

In the short time since, the world has come to a standstill and countries and cities are working around the clock to ensure that essential transport services continue.

Just like the right to adequate housing, sustainable mobility in cities has now become life-saving.

Whilst global connectivity spreads Covid-19, strong investments in sustainable mobility in cities and regions now provide the transportation capacity to sustain life in cities.

Where public transport is generous, cities can now support lower and safer occupancies in trains, trams and buses. Where walkways and bike lanes are wide, people can exercise, reducing the physical and mental stress of social distancing and staying at home. Where living circles were planned, people can walk and find essential services for daily life.

But not all is well, COVID-19 and the war against its spread is impacting lives in developed countries that was never imagined. The socio-economic fallout will be hardest felt in developing countries.

A lot of weaknesses are now exposed. Policies which promoted competition without service guarantees have come to haunt us.

Exemptions to good planning principles have led to sprawl making inclusive mobility unaffordable, unreliable and now unavailable.



Too much mobility in too many countries and cities has been supported by an informal sector of self-employed drivers of share-cars and poorly qualified operators of mini-buses. They are now all out of a job.

Mobility on the cheap stretched agglomeration economies but made urban economies vulnerable.

UN-Habitat calls on cities to ensure that all modes of public transport are now considered a public service, **to save lives and livelihoods.**

Cities must now sustain **good public service AND the trust in good public service.** Sanitizing buses and widening bike lanes support the same goal, that is mobility in the safest possible way.

Sustaining the trust in public services will support economic recovery beyond the outbreak. Cities must also sustain small operators and delivery people, whether these services were shaped by poverty or innovation. We all benefited from mobility on the cheap, and we now need the service.

Providing small operators and delivery people with income support, health insurance and safety equipment will support them to collaborate in the safe and organised re-thinking of mobility.

Continued social distancing will be most difficult in the confined spaces of public transport.

Cities will have to set standards, subsidies but also priority access to those people who need affordable and safe transport most. This includes people with disabilities and those employed in essential services.

And finally, national governments will have to set policies promoting continued working from home, to promote urban life and urban economies to revolve around living circles and work-life proximity.

In summary, I appeal to all to provide safe mobility today and to start planning the sustainable mobility of tomorrow. There is no other way to get us beyond the outbreak.