

High Level Political Forum 2020
Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate the implementation
Thursday 9 July 2020

My dear friend Gino van Begin, Secretary-General of ICLEI

Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning, afternoon, and evening to all of you!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.

Allow me also to thank all of you for your remarkable efforts in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

When we started this year, this **Decade of Action on the SDGs**, little did we know that we would soon be battling - a global challenge that threatens to push back the hard-won gains and progress made on several goals over the past five years.

The **COVID-19 pandemic is exposing and exacerbating deep-rooted structural fragilities and spatial inequalities** in our cities and communities. Some people say that the SDGs are now luxury items. I'm afraid I have to disagree. In fact, COVID-19 has again reminded us why these global commitments are extremely important.

The pandemic has shown that if there is a will, there is a way to expanding water and sanitation access to slums and informal settlements. In Kisumu, some basic urban services like handwashing facilities have become permanent. Such efforts not only help to contain the pandemic but will advance our work towards the achievement of the **SDG 6**.

If we can address the issues of migration, the informal economy, creation of local jobs, and commit to strong social protection measures, it will help in socio-economic recovery, and we can advance on **SDG 8 to provide decent jobs and foster economic growth**.

If we can maintain the reduction in emissions that we have seen due to lockdowns, then we will advance on **SDG 13** on Climate Action and the goals of the Paris agreement.

If we understand that safe and adequate housing is both a prevention and cure for the pandemic, and work towards address the housing challenge in cities and human settlements, we can reach an important target of **SDG 11**.

Greater resilience to future pandemics, through better planning, connectivity, decent and adequate shelter, access to basic services, better planned public spaces and green-blue networks, will also improve the resilience of communities and societies to multiple hazards, in line with the Sendai Framework.

Cities are increasingly relying on digital technologies and connectivity to sustain operations and deliver services. Still, people living in slums and deprived neighbourhoods in cities may be further marginalized by gaps in digital literacy and limited access to computers or the internet. **We must plan our infrastructure in such a way that the digital divide can be bridged, and support innovations so we can reach those being left furthest behind.**

Dear friends,

The response to this pandemic must accelerate rather than undermine progress against the SDGs, including **decarbonization, building resilient cities, and ensuring social inclusion. Financing for post-COVID recovery is not distinct from funding for an inclusive and sustainable future.**

UN-Habitat is ready to support you in making policy choices that place people and their rights at the centre. This is the opportunity for us to transform, to build back better, build back greener and to leapfrog into a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future for all.