



**REMARKS OF H.E. MR. VOLKAN BOZKIR – PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
UN-Habitat’s High-level Midterm Review of the Committee of
Permanent Representatives (CPR) to UN-Habitat
29 June 2021**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank Executive Director Sharif for her kind invitation to address you, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, at the Mid-Term Review today. I, like the huge habitat community, am looking forward to the evaluation of progress made towards the implementation of UN-Habitat’s Strategic Plan 2020-2023 and other resolutions adopted by Member States at the first session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly convened here in Nairobi, in May 2019.

Also, I would like to warmly thank the Republic of Kenya - especially President Kenyatta who I will have the honour to meet today after this meeting - for hosting the UN’s substantial presence in Nairobi serving the region and the world. Kenyan commitment to multilateralism is exemplary. Her advocacy for sustainable urban development in Kenya, at the African Union, and throughout the world is to be applauded.

Excellencies,

COVID-19 has demonstrated the undeniable connection between the urban and natural world. Also, between the health of the planet and our own health.

At the first ever United Nations Biodiversity Summit held at the General Assembly last September, and also at the recent High-level Dialogue on Desertification, Degradation and Drought, I reiterated the scientific community’s message that I will share again with you today: the degradation of local and regional ecosystems, unsustainable agricultural practices, and the exploitation of natural resources, are putting critical pressure on world ecosystems.



Our unsustainable use of nature increases the risk of zoonosis – when an infectious disease jumps from animals to humans.

Urban areas, which are increasingly where populations in many countries reside, have borne the brunt of the crisis, with 90 per cent of reported cases.

I welcome UN-Habitat's efforts to support global, national and city-level response plans, particularly in urban areas and look forward to the review of the implementation of the UN-Habitat COVID response plan.

Governments and cities are struggling to raise the funds needed to implement green COVID recoveries. One of many of the UN Habitat's Strategic Plan objectives is to increase and equitably distribute land-based revenues. I urge Member States to urgently fund the Strategic Plan, and support countries green recoveries from the pandemic.

Excellencies,

In Resolution 73/239, the General Assembly decided to restructure UN-Habitat's governance to achieve the shared goal of delivering better for the people we serve. Aligning UN-Habitat's work with the reform of the UN Development System, as decided upon by the General Assembly, is a high priority.

These reforms will pave the way to expedite the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, a better blueprint for the sustainable future of cities and human settlements. Cities are increasingly where our people choose to live and can have enormous global influence. Green recoveries in cities can catalyse national level responses.

I urge Member States to use the Urban Agenda Platform, an online knowledge platform to share information on their implementation efforts and best practices, which will also help to foster an integrated approach to urban development.

Throughout my career as a diplomat, and politician, I have witnessed local governments and fellow parliamentarians driving critical action across the entire SDG agenda. The rapid urbanization megatrend requires upscaled action via a whole-of-society and whole-of-system approach spanning development, humanitarian, and peace building areas of work. Our organization must reach the rapidly urbanizing populations it serves.



I call on global leaders raise the political significance of urbanization. As our populations continue to flock to urban centers, we cannot afford to ignore their specific needs.

In the context of building back better from the pandemic, allow me to touch on three important issues.

Firstly, greening cities. To build a more sustainable and more resilient world, green urban recoveries must emphasize environmental protections, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. This will not only help to mitigate future pandemic and environmental risks, thus saving potential relief spending, it will help to unlock an estimated US\$ 10 trillion in business opportunities and create 395 million jobs by 2030.

It is time to unleash our environmental imaginations and turn our urban jungles into eco-cities. Imagine green roofs, buildings draped in vertical forests and lush parks and trees, animal crossings above roads and high-ways, a future where nature and cities are united. Nairobi is a beautiful example of the potential for this union. In this regard, I look forward to visiting Karura Forest and Nairobi's National Park during my stay, to highlight the importance of biodiversity and land restoration and preservation.

Living in harmony with nature will also require reimagining our food systems in urban contexts. I reiterate my call to member states, local authorities and stakeholders to conduct food system reform dialogues in the run up to the Food Systems Summit this September.

Secondly, addressing the digital divide. The pandemic has accelerated urban trends such as digitalization, shifts to remote work, and virtual delivery of essential services. In this context, the digital divide, between developing and developed countries as well as between urban and rural settings, is exacerbating exclusion and inequality. To fully realize the value to sustainable cities, it is crucial for cities and local governments to identify and address the root causes of exclusion and inequity.



And finally, investing in sustainable infrastructure. While valuable connections are being made, greater coordination at the city, local, regional and national levels, is needed NOW to accelerate efforts to build back better and to adopted sustainable infrastructure for the years to come. Without sustainable infrastructure we will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Excellencies,

The High-Level Meeting to be convened during the 76th session of the UN General Assembly on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda will be a watershed moment for the international community to reaffirm its commitment to sustainable urbanization. The regional component to the preparatory process will provide vital input leading up to the High-Level Meeting in 2022. I strongly encourage you to participate in the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development that will be hosted by the respective Regional Economic Commissions in the months leading up to the high-level meeting.

Allow me to conclude by thanking you all here today for your efforts to ensure our urban future is sustainable, is resilient and above all responds to the needs of the populations we serve.

I thank you.