

Speech of the UN-Executive Director at Innovative4Cities Conference: Cities, Climate Change Science and Innovation

Date: 11 October 2021

Welcome to the Innovate for Cities 2021 conference. This is also the second Cities and Climate Science conference bringing together UN-Habitat and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy in partnership with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as the co-sponsor.

Many of the partners of the first conference in Edmonton, as well as numerous other individuals representing a wide range of organisations have actively supported the preparations for this conference, being part of the Science & Innovation Steering Committee, as well as the Partners Network Organising Committee.

We would not have such a diverse event that covers all time zones, without the Regional Curators who are coordinating region-specific events and the mayoral receptions. I would like to thank every one of you, for the tremendous efforts that you have put into strengthening our partnership. I would also like add my thanks to the organisations that have provided financial support to the conference: the European Commission, Resilience First and the University of Melbourne.

I am told that more than 4000 urban stakeholders have registered, and are attending this conference, from every region of the world, representing a wide range of sectors, national and local governments, practitioners, city networks, grassroots organisation, think tanks, academia, and the private sector.

The Innovate for Cities 2021 Conference comes at a critical time. The critical report of IPCC warns that human-induced climate change is already causing extreme weather across the globe. At the same time, the COVID-19 health pandemic continues to ravage economies, resulting in social and political crisis. Globally, exclusion and injustice within countries and within cities could be widely seen. The health and economic impacts of COVID-19, climate change and inequality are all linked. Cities are at the centre of these interconnected crises.

As we begin to see a pathway out of the pandemic, we are also seeing a new consensus on the urgency of climate action emerging, driven by national governments, private sector companies, international financial institutions, civil society, and indeed cities and local governments. We are fortunate to have so much energy in our sails, as we make our way to Glasgow. We must seize the opportunity to make climate change mitigation and adaptation the basis for all future development.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With the launch of “Our common agenda”, the United Nations Secretary-General provides us with the framework for concerted action. He calls on us to strengthen global governance; focus on the future; renew the social contract; and ensure a United Nations fit for a new era. At UN-Habitat, we hear the call for more solidarity and for better multilateralism. This includes harnessing the energy from our partnership for commitments to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

At UN-Habitat, we are excited to co-host the Innovate for Cities 2021 conference. Evidence-based scientific and research-based solutions is what we need at the local level. For the Innovate for Cities conference, I hope we can arrive at a collective action plan that is accompanied by viable financing strategy. As a former mayor, I know that solutions need to be localized and tailored to different financial capacities for cities to take action.

The Innovate for Cities 2021 conference is focused on green recovery, climate justice & equity, positive transformation and innovation. The conference will showcase how cities from every region of the world are rolling out climate action. Cities are also investors and laboratories for innovative solutions. Many cities globally have committed to ambitious targets, aiming to achieve carbon neutrality earlier than 2050, with some cases of cities like Glasgow that will be carbon neutral by 2030. I congratulate them. Meanwhile, we must also empower and enable cities in the developing world to make the same commitment.

Indeed, citizens of the developing world and the urban poor in developed ones have the smallest carbon footprint but will suffer the most from climate change. Today, we are asking the present and future generations to pay the heaviest price, for carbon released in the atmosphere by the industrial and post-industrial world.

The Innovate for Cities 2021 conference has a crucial duty to harness the goodwill we have at the local and regional level, to develop an action plan where all cities and communities can support, invest and commit to implement. It is crucial that national and local governments work together, to define a shared roadmap towards carbon neutrality.

The COVID-19 recovery efforts offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to ensure that economic growth is low-carbon, inclusive, and resilient. Recovery pathways will either entrench the world in a high-carbon, high-pollution trajectory, at odds with the Paris Agreement and the 1.5-degree goal or pave the way for an inclusive and sustainable transition.

Cities and communities must have a seat at the table in the global environmental discourse. Deliberations from the Innovate for Cities 2021 Conference will feed into COP 26. The time to COP26 is short but collectively we can still raise the level of ambition.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As many of you are aware, we have entered the Urban October with a number of celebrations around the globe. Just last week on Monday 4 Oct, I was in Yaounde, Cameroon for this year's celebration of the Global Observance of World Habitat Day, with the theme "Accelerating urban action for a carbon-free world." The Observance brought together ministers from various countries, mayors, heads of UN agencies, a Nobel Prize winner, an international footballer and representatives of the African Union and local government networks.

I would like to take the opportunity to invite all of you to take part in the celebration of World Cities Day on 31 Oct, with the theme of "Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience". This is because cities worldwide are increasingly suffering the effects of climate-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, sea level rise, heatwaves, landslides and storms. I will participate physically in the Global Observance which will take place in Luxor, Egypt.

Thank you!