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Talking points

by

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at the

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates and Mayors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues and friends,

It is with great pleasure I welcome you to the eighty-fourth session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). We gather here at the Palais des Nations united by a common purpose - to foster sustainable, inclusive and climate-resilient urban development for all.

Our world faces interconnected crises - climate change, natural and man-made disasters, the post-COVID economic downturn. In cities, multifaceted and interconnected crises are not only occurring with higher frequency and increased magnitude, but their consequences are greater.

A survey of UNECE member States conducted in 2021 uncovered the widening gap between income and access to safe and affordable housing. Today, the increasing living costs and diminishing public sector resources for affordable housing supply, combined with the substantial number of Internally Displaced Persons (IPDs) in Europe, have exacerbated the housing affordability crisis. This issue is not limited to vulnerable groups but is increasingly impacting middle-class households.

There is a lot of work to do at all levels to ensure good quality of life and sustainable urbanization in cities in the UNECE region. This Committee has a rich legacy of facilitating political support from governments in the region, to promote sustainable and resilient urban development and affordable decent housing. For instance, it has developed a range of innovative instruments to assist cities and countries in addressing their challenges.

- In 2015, UNECE member States demonstrated their political commitment by endorsing the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing, an important document to support affordable, decent and healthy housing that continues to guide our work today.

- In 2021, the UNECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing, and Land Management endorsed the "Place and Life in the ECE – A Regional Action Plan 2030." This plan sets forth policy options to support national governments and cities in addressing the challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to combat inequalities, strengthen capacities, and drive a green, resilient, and inclusive economic recovery.

Today, at this Committee session, we call upon member States, cities, and stakeholders to conduct a thorough review of the implementation of the Regional Action Plan. We also invite deliberations on the commitments outlined in the San Marino Declaration adopted by the Committee last year. In line with the vision set forth in the San Marino Declaration on principles for sustainable and inclusive urban design and architecture, let us work together to create vibrant, resilient cities that meet the changing needs of our societies.

Also, in line with the San Marino Declaration, UNECE is providing technical assistance for the long-term reconstruction of Ukrainian cities through the "UN4UkrainianCities" project; the project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and supported by GIZ, the German development organization. Many Ukrainian cities, including Kharkiv and Mykolaiv, suffered immense losses following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It is imperative that we advocate for an end to this war, in line with the principles outlined in the United Nations Charter and develop plans for the reconstruction. I would like to use this opportunity to express our gratitude to the city governments of Kharkiv, Mykolaiv as well as Borodyanka, as well as the Ministry Restoration of Ukraine, for their commitment to this project.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Norman Foster Foundation and One Works for their pivotal role in formulating a vision for a master plan for Kharkiv and Mykolaiv. By working on a pro-bono basis last year, they paved the way for the work for restoration of these cities even before the launch of the UN4UkrainianCities project.

Dear colleagues,

The year 2030 is fast approaching. The UNECE report on progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), released in April, clearly demonstrates that we are behind schedule. A key factor of success, I believe, lies in acceleration of the localization of the SDGs and stronger engagement of local governments and communities. Without their robust involvement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will remain a distant goal.

At the beginning of this week at the Third Forum of Mayors, we heard mayors commit to achieving the SDGs. The Forum of Mayors is a crucial platform for cities to discuss SDG localization and advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the UNECE region.

UNECE is committed to supporting cities in their journey towards sustainable and smart urban development. Today, we unveil smart sustainable city profiles for Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the capital city of Montenegro, Podgorica. These profiles offer concrete policy recommendations based on key performance indicators, providing a road map for their sustainable development. We are ready to continue working hand-in-hand with these cities to build their capacities and secure financing so they can implement such policy recommendations.

On urban resilience, we are also actively cooperating with our fellow UN Regional Commissions and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). We are excited to have representatives of all the four UN regional commissions here in Geneva and we look forward to hearing from all of them during the Committee session. This collaboration at the global level promotes the exchange of best practices and use of innovative approaches to support urban resilience, considering the specificities of each of our respective regions. I would like to express special thanks to the Global Cities Hub for helping us bring representatives from all the regional commissions here today .

Many urban challenges hinge on effective land use. The UNECE Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA) has demonstrated exceptional work in supporting

member States in fostering security of tenure and enhancing cadastres and land registries. The successful WPLA session in April showcased the dedication of the member States to strengthening joint cooperation in the digitalization of land administration systems, addressing legal barriers to data, building capacities, and monitoring impacts of the “triple crisis” on the land administration sector. The UNECE Real Estate Market Advisory Group, a team of specialists, provides the Committee and Governments advice on creating sustainable real estate markets.

The close collaboration between the Committee, the WPLA, the Forum of Mayors, and the Real Estate Market Advisory Group exemplifies multilevel governance and a multistakeholder approach to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Further strengthening this multistakeholder approach is crucial if we wish to achieve the Global Goals.

Just this Monday, 2 October, the world celebrated World Habitat Day under the theme "Resilient urban economies. Cities as drivers of growth and recovery." Today, as we convene, we also commemorate World Habitat Day and Urban October. It is an honour to have with us the Deputy Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Michal Mlynar, whose commitment to the cooperation we deeply value.

I extend my deep gratitude to each one of you for coming here, for your invaluable contributions and your commitment to working towards resilient and sustainable urban development in the UNECE Region. Let us commence this session with enthusiasm, collaboration, and a shared vision for a better, more sustainable and resilient urban future.

Thank you.