

Opening remarks by Under-Secretary-General Mr. Liu Zhenmin

Third High level Local and Regional Governments Forum

08:30 – 11:30, 13 July 2020

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's Local and Regional Governments Forum, organized in connection with the High-level political forum on sustainable development, is taking place at an extraordinarily challenging time. The world is facing a global crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations - one that is killing people, spreading human suffering, and upending people's lives.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a human crisis – one that is attacking societies at their core. Around the world, local and regional governments have been at the forefront dealing with its effects, reacting to the ever-evolving health crises while trying their best to mitigate the escalating social and economic effects the pandemic is causing.

The impacts will depend on whether the recovery is gradual or rapid, and whether we return to the pre-pandemic world or to one that is more sustainable and equitable.

Initial assessments are sobering - with enormous losses of lives and livelihoods; and deepening poverty and hunger.

Global GDP is expected to contract sharply in 2020 – estimates range from 3.2 percent to 5.2 percent - potentially the largest contraction in economic activity since the Great Depression, and far worse than the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.

One thing, however, is clear - if responses are ad-hoc, underfunded and without a view to long-term goals, the consequences of COVID-19 will be deep and long-lasting, and risk reversing decades of progress.

Colleagues,

While the anticipated outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic are dire, they can be averted by the actions taken now at all levels of governance.

As societies around the world begin to move towards recovery, three priorities in particular will enable the world to build back better in a unified way.

Firstly, we need to maintain past progress made towards eradicating basic deprivations. Backsliding on the progress already made on the SDGs not only imperils prospects for eradicating basic deprivations - it also reduces resilience to other shocks in the future, especially for the most vulnerable.

Secondly, we need to accelerate the universal provision of quality essential services. Guaranteed universal access to services that provide quality healthcare, education, basic income security, water, sanitation, clean energy and the Internet must become an integral part of the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Thirdly, we need to urgently reverse course on the degradation of nature. Unlike the sudden onset of the pandemic, the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss have built up more slowly. The pandemic itself reveals the size of the challenge, but also affords a chance to observe - even if for a short period - the plausibility of being able to reverse the degradation of nature.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the Political Declaration adopted at the SDG Summit in September 2019, Member States reaffirmed the critical role that cities, local authorities and communities have in implementing and realizing the SDG, and committed to empowering and supporting them in pursuing the 2030 Agenda.

Today, we are very happy to have a mix of distinguished Mayors and Governors, national government representatives, academics, representatives of the United Nations system and other international organizations, and members of the private sector and the civil society gather around this virtual table. Today more than ever we need not only a whole-of-government approach, but a shared vision and commitment of all actors to take action on the SDGs.

In the lead up to 2019 SDG Summit, my Department set up an online knowledge platform to galvanize and capture such ambitious “SDG Acceleration Actions” undertaken by governments and all other non-state actors.

As of today, over 170 bold, game-changing commitments and initiatives, aimed at advancing the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, have been published.

Building on a plurality of approaches, these SDG Acceleration Actions reflect diverse country and sectoral realities, as well as regional dynamics and perspectives. I would invite you all to be inspired by the Actions that have already been registered and to visit the platform to register and share you own efforts to implement the SDGs.

Let us all leverage our collective power and learn from each other so that we can all deliver on the promise we have made to the people around the world in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

I wish you a successful event.
