

Opening Remarks**Local and Regional
Governments Forum 2020****Saturday, 13/07/2020
08.30-12.30 EST, HLPF2020****Excellencies****Honorable Mayors****Partners and Friends****Ladies and gentlemen**

A very good morning, afternoon and evening to all of you, wherever you are in the world!

Introduction

- It is with great honor and immense pleasure that I join you to open this third High Level Local and Regional Governments Forum today.
- Of course, we would have all preferred to be gathered in New York and to conduct this Forum face to face like the last few years. Still, I am glad that, despite the challenges the whole world is being confronted with, we are able to connect to discuss the important issues around local action and recovery vis-à-vis the COVID-19 crisis.
- I wish to thank you all, dear friends, for the remarkable efforts made in fighting this pandemic, for your courage, for your leadership and for the innovative actions developed.
- Local and Regional Governments from around the globe are an inspiration for all of us and I am glad and grateful to see you joining this important Forum in large numbers.
- Nevertheless, local governments alone cannot win the battle against the pandemic and for a sustainable future. This is why I am very happy to see representatives of member states, private sector and civil society also virtually gathered today – a demonstration that inter-sectorial and multilevel partnerships are more important than ever.
- Three years ago, the first High Level Local and Regional Governments Forum took place during the HLPF 2018 to discuss the key role and mission of local governments in localizing the 2030 Agenda.
- Three years after that first convening, that role has been explicitly acknowledged by national governments and international organizations, thanks to the tireless work of local governments network and associations and all of you.
- UN-Habitat has proudly supported the organization of this Forum since its very beginning and you can count on us for the editions to come.
- Let me take a moment to especially thank the Global Task Force of Local and Regional

Governments, with which UN-Habitat interacts daily and that has proven to be a solid, reliable and efficient mechanism of coordination between local governments and international organizations.

COVID-19 and Local and Regional Governments

- This third edition of the LRGF comes at a very appropriate time. After the first wave of COVID-19, countries are now re-thinking and re-planning our way of living.
- But the fight is not over: the possibility of a second and third wave is real, we all need to be prepared and to learn from the good work that has been done until now.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the best and the worst of our world and societies. Solidarity, innovative partnerships and creativity have characterized the response to the health crisis.
- Nevertheless, the chronic and structural inequalities rooted in our societies were clearly highlighted, as the virus and its social and economic consequences hit the most vulnerable and marginalized, the hardest.
- Local and Regional Governments have been and are at the forefront of the fight against the virus, designing and testing innovative policies and initiatives to protect citizens and communities. Now, those same governments need our support to ensure a healthy, equitable and sustainable world.
- Partners, Friends, every crisis also brings an opportunity in its wake. This is the opportunity for us to transform, to build back better, to leapfrog into a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future for all. This crisis can be – indeed it must be – the turning point in the pursuit of our common goals.
- This transformation needs to start from the bottom-up. Local and Regional Governments, as the level closest to the citizens, have a clear and complete understanding of the needs and priorities of their communities. We all know, more than ever now, that Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, will never be achieved without a full engagement of local and regional governments.

Local and Regional Governments role in the NUA and SDGs

- All of the SDGs as well as the New Urban Agenda have targets that are directly or indirectly related to the daily work of Local and Regional Governments.
- They should therefore not be seen as passive actors and mere implementers of these agendas, but as key drivers from which the success of the Global Goals will depend – especially in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Local and Regional Governments have unique legitimacy to bring together all sectors and interests in their communities – they can raise awareness and gather citizens to develop and act for a shared vision for a sustainable future.
- Also, they forge partnerships at the national and international level, facilitating scale up of best practices and the exchange of cutting edge knowledge among territories.

- They are catalyst of innovation – pioneers in designing and testing new policies and initiatives to deliver better services and improve the life standards of their communities.
- This is what Local and Regional Governments are: the key players from which our sustainable future will depend.

Conclusions

- In light of these consideration, I want to reiterate UN-Habitat’s commitment to strengthen our longstanding partnership with the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments, with the objective of supporting post-pandemic recovery as well as the achievement of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.
- Dear partners, dear friends, let’s keep working together and strengthen our alliance to make this world a better place for all.
- You can count on our trust, support and engagement, I am sure I can also count on yours.
- Wishing you inspiring and fruitful discussions and a great third edition of the Local and Regional Governments Forum