

Lilongwe Mayors Forum
Opening Remark by Jong Soo Yoon, Head of UNOSD
16 May 2018

- Hon. Kondwani Nankhumwa, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development;
- His Worship the Mayor of the City of Lilongwe, Councillor Desmond Bikoko;
- All the Mayors participating in this Forum;
- Mr. Kiswel Dakamau, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development;
- Other Senior Officials from the Malawi Government and Lilongwe City Council;
- UNDP Resident Representative, Ms. Maria José Torres;
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

My name is Jong Soo Yoon, and I am the Head of the UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD), based in Incheon, South Korea, one of the organizers of this event taking place in Lilongwe over the next 3 days.

UNOSD was established in 2011, through an agreement between the Korean Government and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in New York.

Our Office aims to contribute to the efforts of the United Nations system in the coordination and implementation of internationally agreed development frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We support U.N. Member States in planning and undertaking integrated sustainability transformation, notably through knowledge sharing, research, training and partnership building.

It is my great pleasure and honour to be part of this International Mayors Forum organized in collaboration with the Government of Malawi, the City Council of Lilongwe, UNDP in Malawi, and UNPOG in Incheon.

Particularly I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to Mayor of Lilongwe for your hospitality and UNDP colleagues in Malawi for your support.

As you know, we are in the third year of the 2030 Agenda and significant progress has been made globally towards achieving the SDGs. Recognizing that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is ultimately a national responsibility, though under international collaboration, national governments have begun internalizing the SDGs into their planning processes and coordinating internally and among ministries.

Cities and urban settlements are themselves at the core of major global frameworks, starting with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs adopted in September 2015, where SDG 11 is specifically aiming at “making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.

Cities are also intimately linked to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito, which placed even more emphasis on the role of cities in achieving the SDGs well beyond SDG 11.

There is, for instance, a growing recognition by experts and leaders around the world that more than two thirds of the 169 SDG targets can only be achieved through the substantial involvement of local actors, particularly those in urban areas.

This clearly stresses the need for localizing the SDGs, where local governments and local stakeholders play an essential role in adapting and implementing those SDG targets in cities and human settlements.

The 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development taking place at the UN Headquarters in New York next July will review the progress towards the 2030 Agenda under the overarching theme of “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”.

As you know, we are facing an unprecedented pace of urbanization in human history .

Needless to say, that such urbanization trend will cause major social, economic and environmental challenges. Worldwide, the number in slums keeps rising and rapid urbanization is also putting pressure on fresh water supplies and the city’s infrastructure. However, it is unrealistic to think we can stop urbanization. Instead, we must learn to manage it so to reduce its negative impacts and benefit from the tremendous opportunities it can offer.

This is why, Ladies and Gentlemen, this Mayors forum is so important.

I note with great satisfaction on the number of participants who joined this International Mayors Forum in Lilongwe. A year ago, we did a similar exercise in Vientiane, in Laos. And I am glad to note that today we have nearly doubled the number of participants compared to last year’s Mayors Forum held in the Asia region.

And I hope that, through the exchange of knowledge and experiences that we are having here this week, we will continue to expand this community of practice, and more mayors and city leaders will join our ranks in large numbers next year, potentially in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Let me end here, by thanking you all for being here today. Your positive response to our invitation in joining this Forum is a remarkable proof of your commitment to this cause.

I’d like to wish all the best for a successful and productive Forum which, at the same time, is just one more step towards strengthening our collaboration over the coming months and even the next thirteen years regarding the implementation of the SDGs at local level.

Thank you very much.