



**2020 International Mayors Forum**  
**"Local Governments and the Sustainable Development Goals in times of the COVID-19 pandemic"**

**Date: 2 December 2020**

**10:00pm (Republic of Korea), 2:00pm (Geneva), 8:00am (New York)**

**Concept Note and Programme**

*"We need to turn the recovery into a real opportunity to do things right for the future"*  
– United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres

**Registration Link: <https://bit.ly/36YQ5mR>**

**Background**

Cities and metropolitan areas are intimately linked to sustainable development and are expected to play a key role in accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They accommodate more than half of the global population today and this share is projected to reach 60 per cent by 2030 at the current rate of urbanization. Cities also contribute to 60 per cent of global GDP.<sup>1</sup> They are also one of the three levels of action that the UN Secretary General called for all sectors of society to mobilize themselves for the accelerated delivery of the Global Goals during the Decade of Action. The other levels of action are global and people actions.<sup>2</sup>

Local governments play a critical role in providing access to basic services in normal times and ensuring that these public services are uninterrupted in times of adversity. They also act as frontline responders in crisis response, recovery and rebuilding. The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated many of the challenges local authorities are facing in keeping with these responsibilities. During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that 90 per cent of all reported COVID-19 cases have been taking place in urban areas, where all sectors have been deeply impacted.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the challenge of restoring life to normal, local governments are also facing additional challenges

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/>

<sup>2</sup> In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action on three levels: **global action** to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals; **local action** embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; and **people action**, including by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations (2020) Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World. Available at [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_covid\\_urban\\_world\\_july\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf)

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on multiple fronts and must double their efforts to accelerate progress on the SDGs as well as build back better by achieving a sustainable recovery and building the resilience of their communities in the short and the long run.

The current trend of urbanization is often accompanied by significant social and environmental challenges, such as the lack of access to adequate and affordable housing, urban infrastructure and basic services for a growing number of citizens. This is particularly true in developing countries, where 95% of urban expansion will take place over the next decades.

Urban dwellers are also experiencing rising inequality and social exclusion, unemployment, food insecurity and extreme poverty —a situation that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only unveiled but also aggravated in both developed and developing nations.

Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are found to a large extent in cities, which are also main contributors to climate change and environmental degradation. While accommodating more than half of the world's population on only 2 to 3 per cent of the earth's land, the world's cities nonetheless account for 60-80 per cent of global energy consumption and generate as much as 75 per cent of the energy-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Rapid urbanization is exacerbating the environmental impact of cities exerting pressure on fresh water supplies, sanitation, the living environment, and public health. Figures from 2016 showed that air pollution was affecting 90 per cent of urban dwellers, causing 4.2 million deaths. Cities are also rapidly becoming more vulnerable to weather- and climate-related extreme events, which are increasing in frequency and severity with climate change, as 90 per cent of major disasters over the last two decades have been climate-related disasters.<sup>4</sup>

Local governments can play a central role in addressing the social and environmental challenges taking place in urban areas, ensuring a swift and sustainable recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerating progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN Secretary-General has underscored that local governments have already been taking action to recover better from the pandemic. He also emphasized that more must be done to strengthen the capacities of local governments for a "green, inclusive and resilient economic recovery that will transform cities and address the climate and pollution crises".<sup>5</sup>

In September 2019, during the UN Secretary-General's SDG Summit, Heads of State agreed on a Political Declaration (A/RES/74/4) for the coming Decade of Action, committing to "Bolstering local action to accelerate implementation". The Political Declaration also commits Member States to "empower and support cities, local authorities and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda" given the central role of cities in accelerating progress for the SDGs.

In this vein, UNOSD is convening mayors and local leaders and stakeholders to take part in this special webinar of the 2020 International Mayors Forum to discuss strategies and measures to enhance local governments' knowledge and skills around a series of essential

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<sup>4</sup> UNISDR (2015) The Human Cost of Weather-Related Disasters. Available at [https://www.unisdr.org/files/46796\\_cop21weatherdisastersreport2015.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/46796_cop21weatherdisastersreport2015.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> "By focusing on high ecological transformation and job creation, stimulus packages can steer growth towards a low-carbon, resilient pathway and advance the Sustainable Development Goals." United Nations Secretary-General (2020) Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-urban-world>

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topics to build back better in the COVID-19 response, while also accelerating progress for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Objectives and Contents**

The general objective of the International Mayors Forum is to provide a platform for policy dialogue and knowledge sharing through presentations and discussions on key aspects related to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals —particularly Goal 11— at local level as a means to achieve a better understanding of progress, gaps, challenges, lessons learnt and specific mechanisms that can accelerate the sustained transformation needed to make societies inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

More specifically, and given the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 International Mayors Forum aims to examine the social, economic and environmental impacts of the current crisis on cities and local governments and identify potential solutions for sustainable responses. It also aims to provide local governments and local actors with knowledge to support a swift recovery from COVID-19 crisis as well as advance the Decade of Action and delivery for sustainable development.

This online meeting is part of the 2020 International Mayors Forum, which this year has been exceptionally taking place through a series of virtual meetings ([2020 International Mayors Forum preparatory webinar series](#)) examining environmental and socio-economic strategies and measures that are being and/or can be implemented by local governments to accelerate COVID-19 recovery as well as the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In accordance with the policy brief launched by the UN Secretary-General on [COVID-19 in an Urban World](#), the 2020 International Mayors Forum focuses on strengthening the capacities of local governments for a "green, resilient and inclusive economic recovery... steer growth towards a low-carbon, resilient pathway and advance the Sustainable Development Goals... (and) building more resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities."

Unlike the previous editions of the UNOSD-led International Mayors Forum that were held in person, this year's Forum is taking place virtually due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. The 2-hour online meeting will discuss the salient points of the recently held webinar series exploring key themes and actions for a swift recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure the delivery of the SDGs by 2030. It will also present some of the additional webinars and capacity building activities that UNOSD will be organizing over the coming weeks and months to support local governments in their recovery and development actions, as an extension of the 2020 International Mayors Forum.

Experts and representatives of the United Nations, national and subnational governments and civil society organizations will also discuss initiatives and programmes being implemented in different parts of the world that are supporting a rapid and sustainable recovery from the current crises and SDG delivery at local level. The speakers (as well as the audience) will also be asked to share their reflections on local governments' needs for capacity development, to which UNOSD and its partners could potentially respond through its capacity development activities, such as the Mayors Forum in the future.

### Opening Speakers

Moderator: **Mr. Jean D’Aragon**, Senior Sustainable Development Expert, United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD)

- Opening remarks: **Mr. Chun Kyoo Park**, Head, United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD)
- Congratulatory remarks: **H.E. Mr. Myung-Rae Cho**, Minister of Environment, Republic of Korea (video)
- Welcome remarks: **Hon. Mr. Namchoon Park**, Mayor of the Incheon Metropolitan City (video)
- Guest Keynote: **Mr. Amson Sibanda**, Chief, National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

### Presenters

- **Ms. Riina Jussila**, Sustainable Development Officer, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)  
Theme: Localizing the SDGs at sub-national levels: Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)
- **Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi**, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments – Africa (UCLG-Africa)  
Theme: Making African cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- **Ms. Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi**, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific (UCLG-ASPAC)  
Theme: Building urban resilience in Asia-Pacific cities
- **Ms. Jorgelina Hardoy**, Coordinator and Senior Researcher, *Instituto Internacional de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo – America Latina* (IIED – AL)  
Theme: Climate resilience in intermediary cities of Latin America
- **Mr. Sangyoung Park**, Principal Researcher, Korea-Mekong Water Management Collaboration Research Centre, K-Water  
Theme: Smart city development in South Korea
- **Mr. Kazushige Endo**, Director, United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)  
Themes: Climate change/Smart and Resilient Cities – SDG Monitoring and Evaluation Tools
- **Ms. Caroline Lombardo**, Chief, International Tax and Development Cooperation Branch, and **Mr. Daniel Platz**, Economic Affairs Officer, Financing for Sustainable Development Office, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.  
Theme: Managing infrastructure assets for sustainable cities

## **Organizer**

The United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

## **Speaker's Agenda**

The webinar will last for 2 hours:

- Opening statements (25 minutes)
- Presentations (70 minutes)
- Questions & Answers (Q&As) and Discussion (15 minutes)
- Final reflections from the speakers (5 minutes)
- Closing wrap-up (5 minutes)

## **Target Audience**

This Forum aims to engage mayors, sub-national government officials and representatives, and national institutions concerned with SDG implementation at local level in developed and developing countries. The Forum will also be open to non-government experts working in the areas of SDG implementation at the national and local levels. It will also welcome academia, youth, and other interested stakeholders to ensure an inclusive and integrated discussion on accelerated local solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Contact Information**

For any questions or comments please contact Mr. Jean D'Aragon, Senior Sustainable Development Expert, UNOSD at [daragon@un.org](mailto:daragon@un.org); and Ms. Sara Castro-Hallgren, Programme Management Expert, UNOSD at [sara.castrohallgren@un.org](mailto:sara.castrohallgren@un.org)

*The webinar will be conducted in English.*