

Welcoming remarks by the  
Executive Director

**Committee of Permanent  
Representatives (CPR) to the  
United Nations Human  
Settlements Programme  
(UN-Habitat)**

**First open-ended meeting –  
High-level Midterm Review**

**Tuesday, 29 June 2021  
UN Gigiri**

Your Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations,  
Your Excellency Mr. Beyene Russom, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives  
Honourable, Cabinet Secretary for Lands and Physical Planning of the Republic of Kenya representing our Host Country Kenya,  
Honorable Martha Delgado, President of the UN-Habitat Assembly,  
Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director General of the United Nations Office in Nairobi,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

A very good morning, good afternoon and good evening. I am grateful to be able to welcome His Excellency Mr. Volkan Boskir, the President of the United Nations General Assembly as well as Cabinet Secretary Ms. Farida Karoney, together with my sister, Director-General Zainab Bangura, to our United Nations Office here in Nairobi. This is a rare privilege and please let me thank the Government of Kenya and UNON for the COVID-19 precautions that are firmly in place.

We are indeed fortunate to be able to come together for this hybrid format session of this first Committee of Permanent Representatives. And we are also fortunate to be able to work and fulfil our responsibilities from home. On 2 June, the International Labour Organisation's estimated of 90 million hours of job loss was surpassed by 10 million. While we have seen some countries advancing quickly on vaccinations, in the developing world the pace has been dramatically different. The slow vaccination process, at global scale, means economic recovery will be slower for all. With new variants of concern emerging, leading to additional rounds of economic constraint and social lockdowns, recovery will be even slower. Until we are all safe, none of us is.

From a purely economic perspective, this represents unprecedented global loss. In cities and communities, until economic stimulus packages reach the ground, there will be little recovery and the commitment to seize this opportunity to build back better, greener or fairer will remain only a fairy tale. This is especially true in Latin America & the Caribbean where the economies have contracted by negative five percent (-5%) in 2020 and in Eastern Europe & Central Asia, where the job loss hours contracted by at least six percent (6%) in the first six months of this year.

From a human perspective, this is devastating now and potentially for years to come. For the first time in more than 20 years, global extreme poverty is expected to rise due to the disruptions of COVID-19, which is compounding the forces of conflict and climate change. Perhaps as much as 150 million people have been thrust into extreme poverty across the world. More than 80% of small businesses report financial stress, and at least two billion informal workers have been directly effected.

In UN-habitat's Cities & Pandemics Report published on 31 March 2021, we highlighted that 95% of all COVID-19 cases were reported in cities. The very concept of cities and urbanisation has been challenged as a result. Yet we have shown, and global evidence points clearly, that it is unsustainable urbanisation

which has magnified the effects of the pandemic. Density is not an inherent risk factor, but inequality, overcrowding, poor access to basic services, and poverty have been directly correlated with higher risk of transmission, illness, and death. We know that even before the pandemic, 75% of cities were becoming more unequal. The pandemic has thrown a bright light on what we have known, and deepened this divide even further.

In a ground-breaking study of 1,700 cities worldwide, we understand that the biggest socio-economic impact will be felt and experienced not only in urban centres but also in the peri-urban and rural areas which depend on cities to be an economic engine. At least 120 million more people will be pushed into poverty and nearly a quarter of the world's population will experience lower standards of living because of this pandemic. The effects will be deep and long-lasting. Progress against the Sustainable Development Goals has stalled and in some cases dramatically moved backward.

Each loss has a human face and we must remember our collective commitment to leave no one and no place behind.

Some countries believe they can vaccinate themselves out of the crisis, yet 85% of all vaccines have gone into the arms of people living in high and upper middle income countries. Only zero point three percent (0.3%) of doses have been administered in low income countries. Until we are all safe, nobody is safe. It is not nationalism that will save us but multilateralism. The UN at 75 is as much needed today as it was after World War II as we face a global crisis of historic proportion.

In my most recent missions in Asia and Africa, I must bear witness to the suffering that many of these communities face and to their terrific resilience, battling poverty and the pandemic, in some cases also facing conflict, displacement, and deep marginalisation

My team and I intend to present to you stories of hope, to bring to all Member States some shining examples of what good integrated planning can mean to human settlements, strengthening resilience, facing the climate crisis and creating a new social contract to bring about greater equality in our cities and communities.

At this mid-term review of the Strategic Plan 2020-2023, which Member States approved in 2019 building on the first UN Programme's strategic plan to receive over 600 comments from UN agencies, I welcome your full engagement and seek your guidance. I believe that the strategic plan which you approved remains robust. With more than USD 190 million received from our donors in the first 15 months of implementation, I believe this further demonstrates the relevance of our mandate and services, as well as the role of sustainable urbanisation in accelerating progress against the SDGs. I believe this meeting presents the opportunity to renew and the strengthen this contract between us.

Your Excellencies

This is our first Mid-Term Review and first convening of the newly constituted CPR. My team and I appreciate the guidance and support from the Chair and the CPR bureau. At the outset, let me thank my team for all the preparations and we have tried our best to meet the expectations of Member States. I have only one request: that we focus on the 120 million people who remain unemployed, the 150 million additional people facing extreme poverty, on the mothers and young people without homes, on the city mayors who are facing deep dilemmas on how to deliver basic services with reduced municipal revenues. Most of all, let us maintain the human face of human settlements and seek to strengthen the social contract between us so that we can help cities and communities build back better, greener and fairer.

Thank you