

## Summary of the Forum of Mayors 2020 6 October 2020

The Forum of Mayors 2020, the first of its kind, brought together mayors and city leaders from around the world to share best practices and develop a shared vision for sustainable urban development. This need was amplified by the COVID-19 crisis, which revealed urban challenges, including the lack of green spaces, the lack of affordable and healthy housing, air pollution, and inadequate public transport systems.

The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) convened the Forum of Mayors 2020 under the theme “City action for a resilient future: Strengthening local government preparedness and response to emergencies and the impact of disasters and climate change.” The Forum is part of the UNECE Sustainable Cities Week, a series of events aiming to strengthen cooperation between national and local governments. Participants agreed that enhanced cooperation could prove invaluable in the global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since implementation takes place at the local level.

The Forum of Mayors, co-chaired by Sami Kanaan, Mayor of Geneva, Switzerland, and Josiane Lei, Mayor of Evian, France, included numerous interventions from mayors and city officials, both physically present and participating virtually. Participants from the UNECE region (Europe, North America, Central Asia, and Caucasus) exchanged innovative ideas and efforts to address the COVID-19 emergency and, simultaneously, combat climate change and move towards achieving the SDGs. Many underscored the need to protect the most vulnerable, promote social and environmental justice, and leave no one behind. A soccer match took place during lunch time under the theme “United for our Goals,” with mayors and ambassadors symbolically promoting international cooperation on the pitch.

The main outcome of the Forum, the Geneva Declaration of Mayors, aligns city leaders’ efforts with the initiative of UN Secretary-General António Guterres to “build back better” and turn the COVID-19 recovery into a real opportunity for shaping a healthy and resilient future.

The Forum of Mayors took place on 6 October 2020 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, and online. The UNECE Sustainable Cities Week, running from 5-9 October, also includes a day devoted to SDG 11 (sustainable cities and

communities), the 81st Session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, and the fifth annual meeting of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) Initiative, which brings together 17 UN agencies and programmes to achieve SDG 11.

Following the successful conclusion of the first ever Forum of Mayors, the second Forum meeting will take place in 2021.

## Forum of Mayors 2020 Report

Following a musical performance by Lakiko (Lana Kostic), Doris Andoni (Albania), Chair of the 81st session of the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, highlighted the Forum of Mayors as an historic event for the UN. She stressed the role of urbanists and architects in building a sustainable future for cities, and the need to ensure the city is accessible, affordable, safe, and healthy for all, not only the wealthy.

Forum Co-Chair Kanaan noted the Forum is a welcome step towards inclusive multilateralism that recognizes the essential contribution of local authorities and communities in achieving global challenges. He drew attention to the Geneva Cities Hub, a platform aiming to facilitate collaboration between cities, international organizations, and other actors in Geneva. Noting global urbanization trends, he stressed the need to involve local governments in efforts to achieve the SDGs and to “reinvent the urban way of life” to respond to the challenges cities face.

Highlighting that the Forum will provide inspiration “for rethinking our urban realities,” Olga Algayerova, UNECE Executive Secretary, said local governments are on the frontline of addressing the pandemic, which hit cities the hardest. She noted national governments alone cannot address global

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**Sami Kanaan**, Mayor of Geneva, Switzerland; **Norman Foster**, Architect; **Doris Andoni**, Chair of the 81st session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, UNECE; and **Olga Algayerova**, UNECE Executive Secretary

challenges, particularly climate change, and called for engaging local actors in achieving the SDGs. She drew attention to the second UN Decade of Action for Road Safety, noting cities can make a difference on road safety, and invited participants to join the UNECE Trees in Cities Challenge.

Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General, UN Office at Geneva, stressed implementation takes place locally, demonstrating the role of local governments in sustainable development. She described the COVID-19 crisis as the “deepest crisis since the Second World War for multilateralism,” pointing to the increasing global interdependence that creates both vulnerabilities and opportunities. She highlighted the Geneva Cities Hub, and called for the “building back better” agenda to include all aspects of urban life.

Giuseppe Sala, Mayor of Milan, Italy, focused on the key role of municipalities in addressing COVID-19 and climate change. He emphasized that the most vulnerable were the hardest hit by COVID-19, which exacerbated existing inequalities. Sala stressed any recovery must be rooted in equity and climate action, and highlighted the C40 Cities Network, which envisions a global green new deal based on an inclusive economy, resilience and equity, and health and well-being. Calling for policies that correct injustices and create decent green jobs for all, he underscored that rapidly adapting our urban lifestyle to new ambitions is possible.

Architect Norman Foster noted the history of cities is a “history of crisis and change,” which resulted in better cities. He used the example of the cholera epidemic more than a century ago, which led to the creation of modern sanitation and underground infrastructure in London. He said the hallmark of our age is mobility of people, goods, and information, and noted that the current crises create new attitudes in citizens in terms of “receptivity for progressive change.” Stressing that “in the long term, we live in a time of opportunity,” Foster addressed the need for affordable housing, the resurgence of neighborhoods, and the need to rethink urban zoning.

Abdulah Skaka, Mayor of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, drew attention to city measures to address the pandemic, including street disinfection and soup kitchens, assistance to the elderly, and support to sister cities in Italy.

Gergely Karácsony, Mayor of Budapest, Hungary, highlighted the main pillars of the city’s policies, including climate action and green policies, the strengthening of participatory democracy, and social justice. Voicing his support for the Geneva Declaration of Mayors, he noted the emergence of local and urban governance in global politics. He concluded by a call to make a reality the old slogan “think globally, act locally.”

Jānis Vilnītis, Chairman of the City Council of Liepāja, Latvia, drew attention to public awareness and crisis management efforts, among other measures, that make Latvia, and the city of Liepāja, among the safest in Europe in terms of the pandemic.

Konstantin Georgieski, Mayor of Ohrid, North Macedonia, said lake Ohrid is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and stressed the need to protect the right to a healthy and clean environment. He highlighted measures to restore parks and recreation areas, and reduce air pollution, including through subsidizing old heater replacement and bicycle use.

Peter Danielsson, Mayor of Helsingborg, Sweden, stressed climate change remains the most urgent challenge of our generation, noting cities in developed regions in particular need to step up action. He highlighted the city’s goal to become climate neutral by 2035, its focus on innovation, and efforts on circularity, including success in reusing or recycling 99% of its waste.

Conxita Marsol Riart, Mayor of Andorra la Vella, Andorra, said successful response to the pandemic depends on collaboration between administration and citizens, highlighting free testing for the entire population, creation of pedestrian zones and open spaces, and tax exemptions during the lockdown, among her city’s efforts.

Erion Veliaj, Mayor of Tirana, Albania, said two earthquakes hit the city in addition to COVID-19, and focused on efforts for



**Norman Foster**, Architect

greener, more sustainable rebuilding. He highlighted initiatives for encouraging bicycle use and tree planting, and economic measures to assist those impacted.

Laia Bonet, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona, Spain, said despite the health crisis and the accompanying social and economic emergencies, cities are “as alive as ever.” She called for guaranteeing social rights to foster the necessary urban and ecological transition, and noted the digital divide may become a driver of inequality, requiring active digital inclusion policies.

Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Israel, said during the pandemic different communities came together “to face the common enemy.” She noted the pandemic’s “severe” impact on the tourism industry, and described initiatives on building infrastructure that will foster dialogue and reconciliation even after the COVID-19 emergency is over.

Tassos Kriekoukis, diplomatic advisor of Kostas Bakoyannis, Mayor of Athens, Greece, referred to the implementation of concrete measures to achieve the SDGs, including the Great Walk of Athens. He described social structures for vulnerable groups, enhanced medical care measures, including psychological support, new systems of digital municipal services, and economic measures for those in need.

Co-Chair Lei highlighted Evian’s efforts to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

Hazel Chu, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Ireland, provided examples of the city’s efforts to build resilience in the face of the pandemic, particularly regarding safety in transport and mobility, such as pedestrian and cycling routes, and efforts to protect the homeless.

Zdeněk Hřib, Mayor of Prague, Czech Republic, drew attention to the city’s climate pledge and multidisciplinary commission on climate change, endorsement of the European Green Deal and the green recovery approach, and projects on sustainable mobility and the circular economy.

Nina Abrahameczik, Vienna City Council, Austria, noted the city’s strategy for resilient, inclusive, and sustainable recovery, which builds on its strong public sector, including health and



**Tomaso Rossini**, Captain of the Castle, San Marino

social services, and the use of financial reserves developed during previous years.

Martin Horn, Mayor of Freiburg, Germany, pointed to national efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic, stressing the consensus among politicians and the public to follow scientific advice. Regarding the climate crisis, he described local initiatives for sustainable transport and housing, emphasizing the need for cross-border collaboration.

Morten Wolden, Chief Executive of Trondheim, Norway, focused on efforts to make Trondheim the first energy-positive city. He underscored that investing in people and sustainable systems represents “huge” potential for sustainable value creation, noting the need for building networks of excellence.

Kishwar Shamirov, Mayor of Khorog, Tajikistan, described local city planning initiatives to enhance sustainability and attract investments. He stressed cities are “living organisms,” and discussed inclusive urban development programmes, co-organized with UN-Habitat.

Tomaso Rossini, Captain of the Castle, San Marino, said human survival greatly depends on learning from previous experience, noting “the COVID-19 pandemic taught us what is really important and indispensable.” He pointed out that “quality of life” and “quality of space” are interrelated, drawing attention to land-use change and biodiversity loss.

Zoran Radojičić, Mayor of Belgrade, Serbia, focused on his city’s efforts to address impacts of floods in 2014, including by setting up early warning systems, a situation center, and a siren project. Noting that due to climate change the frequency of extreme weather events will increase in the future, he called for increased global collaboration.

Joana Balsemão, Deputy Mayor of Cascais, Portugal, highlighted the city’s activities to address the pandemic, including the purchase of protective gear, establishment of testing centers and shelters for the homeless, and establishment of partnerships to accelerate medical appointments postponed during the first wave.

Stressing affordable housing is a matter of public discourse, Lucia Štasselová, Deputy Mayor of Bratislava, Slovakia, noted



Co-Chair **Josiane Lei**, Mayor of Evian, France



Zoran Radojičić, Mayor of Belgrade, Serbia

the “excellent management” of the first wave of the pandemic was mainly due to citizens’ “excellent behavior.” She pointed to the city’s COVID-19 action plan, including creating shelters for the homeless.

Gregor Macedoni, Mayor of Novo Mesto, Slovenia, presented on lessons learnt from the city’s digital transformation efforts to enhance mobility and environmental management.

Alec von Graffenried, Mayor of Bern, Switzerland, outlined the city’s successful management of the pandemic due to hospital infrastructure, efforts to increase cycling rates in the city, and organization of sports and cultural events while respecting COVID-19 safety rules.

Dagur Bergþóruson Eggertsson, Mayor of Reykjavík, Iceland, described local efforts to address COVID-19, taking into account the economy, the environment, and societal challenges. He described a “new green deal initiative,” which articulates a path towards carbon neutrality and promotes green development to counterbalance the gap the tourism industry left behind.

Susan Aitken, Leader of Glasgow City Council, UK, spoke about the twin challenges of climate change and COVID-19, stressing the need to address the carbon reduction agenda, the social justice agenda, and COVID-19 recovery together. She drew attention to the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be hosted in Glasgow in November 2021.

Ilsur Metshin, Mayor of Kazan, Russian Federation, focused on sustainable transport, including electric vehicles, bus modernization, and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

Ion Ceban, Mayor of Chişinău, Moldova, described COVID-19-related measures to protect medical staff, ensure hospital capacity, and protect the most vulnerable, focusing on the establishment of an online educational programme and services’ digitalization.

Maia Bitadze, Deputy Mayor of Tbilisi, Georgia, said COVID-19 showed how human health is directly connected to the natural world. She discussed policies promoting sustainable transport and combating air pollution, stressing the need for public participation.

Pierre Hurmic, Mayor of Bordeaux, France, focused on examples to promote balance between buildings and green spaces in the city, soft mobility, and local democracy.

Bill Peduto, Mayor of Pittsburgh, US, outlined the city’s efforts to launch a center of excellence for high-performance buildings and, together with 11 other cities, to divest pension funds from the fossil fuel industry.

Lisa Helps, Mayor of Victoria, Canada, presented the city’s action plan “Victoria 3.0” on recovery, reinvention, and resilience, focusing on driving the economy towards low-carbon prosperity and building on the blue economy.

Serhii Sukhomlyn, Mayor of Zhytomyr, Ukraine, highlighted plans for electric transport development and renewable energy use.

Niyazi Bayramov, Mayor of Ganja, Azerbaijan, stressed efforts towards sustainability and attracting investment.

Andres Jaadla, Vice Mayor of Rakvere, Estonia, shared plans on energy efficiency and climate neutrality by 2035.

Co-Chair Lei then invited the participants to approve the Geneva Declaration of Mayors. Participants endorsed the Declaration by acclamation. Co-Chair Lei closed the meeting at 4:07 pm.

### ***Geneva Declaration of Mayors***

The Declaration focuses on reshaping our urban realities in times of change. It describes the COVID-19 pandemic as “an unprecedented emergency” in our cities that threatened our health, damaged our economies, and put to test cities’ administrations. At the same time, it acknowledges a valuable lesson to be learned from the crisis: rapid change of our urban reality is possible, behavior patterns can be adapted, and humans can stand in solidarity for a common cause.

Aligning with efforts to achieve SDG 11 and the initiative of UN Secretary-General António Guterres to “build back better” and turn the recovery into a real opportunity for shaping a healthy and resilient future, the Mayors of the UNECE region aspire to:

- strengthen the resilience of cities, by increasing the ability to anticipate, manage, and recover from any future emergency, and by creating environments that improve the physical, mental, and environmental health of communities;
- take ambitious climate action, accelerating the transition to carbon neutrality and focusing on climate change adaptation;



Participants endorse by acclamation the Geneva Declaration of Mayors.

- make cities greener by promoting urban biodiversity, creating opportunities for urban micro-farming, and tackling food waste;
- accelerate the transition to sustainable energy while improving the energy efficiency of cities and promoting high-performance buildings;
- ensure urban transport is sustainable through the design of appropriate transport systems that enhances their resilience and preparedness, and the promotion of safe, secure, green, healthy, and affordable smart mobility solutions;
- ensure housing is affordable, healthy, and adequate, actively tackling the undersupply of affordable housing, mounting urban poverty, and homelessness, as well as improving access to healthy and good quality housing;
- make cities more equitable and inclusive by guaranteeing equal rights and participation for all, ensuring women fully participate in political decision making, and ensuring that contingency plans respond to the needs of different population groups; and
- turn these aspirations into reality using the Forum of Mayors as a platform for mutual learning, spreading the word, tracking progress, and achieving a multiplier effect through urban networks.

### Upcoming Meetings

**81st session of the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management:** The meeting will discuss implementation of key international agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda, and the Geneva UN Charter for Sustainable Housing. **dates:** 6-8 October 2020 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland, and online **www:** <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53377>

**Annual Meeting of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) Initiative:** U4SSC, a UN initiative with a

focus on SDG 11, serves as the global platform to advocate for public policy and to encourage the use of information and communication technologies to ease the transition to smart sustainable cities. The annual meeting of partners will discuss outcomes of activities since October 2019 and will plan activities for 2020-2021. **date:** 9 October 2020 **location:** online **www:** <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=55223>

**International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020:** The theme of the 2020 International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction is “Disaster risk governance.” COVID-19 and the climate emergency show that we need a clear vision, plans, and competent, empowered institutions acting on scientific evidence for the public good. **date:** 13 October 2020 **location:** global **www:** <https://www.un.org/en/observances/disaster-reduction-day>

**World Cities Day:** The 2020 World Cities Day is observed under the theme “Valuing our communities and cities.” As the impact of COVID-19 re-shapes urban life around the world, local communities play a key role in contributing to keeping people safe and maintaining economic activities. **date:** 31 October 2020 **location:** global **www:** <https://www.un.org/en/observances/cities-day>

**Fifth Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5):** UNEA-5 will take place under the theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.” Its aim is to connect and consolidate environmental actions within the context of sustainable development, and motivate the sharing and implementation of successful approaches. **dates:** 22-26 February 2021 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** <https://environmentassembly.unenvironment.org/unea5>

**High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF):** The ninth session of the HLPF will take place over eight days in July 2021 under the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, that promotes the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.” **dates:** 6-15 July 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York (TBD) **www:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

### Glossary

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNECE	UN Economic Commission for Europe
U4SSC	United for Smart Sustainable Cities