



International Science Council



**Ten UN agencies joined the 15th Global Forum on Human Settlements
-- for promoting post-pandemic recovery and transformation
towards resilient cities and healthy planet**



(October 16) The 15th Annual Session of Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS 2020) was successfully held in a virtual format as an observance of Urban October on October 15-16, 2020, with the theme being “Post-Pandemic Recovery and Transformation: Resilient Cities, Healthy Planet”. This year’s forum is supported by a record lineup of 24 authoritative organizations, including 10 UN agencies and Asian Development Bank. Some 100 distinguished speakers and commentators contributed to the in-depth discussions and analysis on a range of challenges, such as public health crisis, ecological disruption and climate change that cities have had to wrestle with so as to embark on a path to sustainable development. While providing timely scientific solutions and policy recommendations, the forum calls on the global

community to accelerate green transformation in recovery.

The forum was addressed by Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Chairman of GFHS, Former UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative; Prof. Petteri Taalas, Secretary General, World Meteorological Organization; Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity; Malcolm Johnson, Deputy Secretary General of International Telecommunication Union; Dr. Bambang Susantono, Vice President of Asian Development Bank; ZHANG Xinsheng, President, International Union for Conservation of Nature; Satya Tripathi, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Head of New York Office, UN Environment Programme; Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, former UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; Marco Lambertini, Director General of WWF International; Dr. Awni Behnam, Fmr. United Nations Assistant Secretary General, Hon. President, International Ocean Institute, and many senior officials of international organizations, government officials, well-known experts and scholars, entrepreneurs, and heads of non-profit organizations. The two-day forum has reached out to more than 100,000 professional audiences through live streaming and participation.



Distinguished speakers delivering opening remarks

Prof. Petteri Taalas pointed out that 4.5 billion people are affected by disasters from 1998 to 2017, and 96% of disasters are weather related. In addition, water stress is a global challenge that needs to be tackled urgently and systematically. Meanwhile, deterioration of air quality has been exacerbated by stagnant heat wave. Nevertheless, there are win-win opportunities in climate mitigation, particularly through stepping up efforts in promoting electric transportation, eco-mobility and renewable energy.

Patricia Espinosa reaffirmed the important role of inclusive multilateralism when it comes to helping cities and communities around the world make the energy transformation we so urgently need. She also stressed that “we must ensure the transformation to a more renewable future is a just transition. It must be a process that helps those working in high-emissions sectors get the training they need to make the transition to new jobs mastering new technologies in a cleaner, greener energy sector. Boosting ambition, building a more resilient future, and providing a just transition from fossil to green: those are the three key elements we need to build a cleaner, greener and healthier future. But that’s not all we need—we also need strong National Adaptation Plans to back up this work.”

Elizabeth Mrema said that the convening of the forum is timely as we gain increasing clarity on the connection between the resilience of human societies to pandemics, such as COVID-19, and the way we address the combined and interlinked challenges of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. We need to engage sectors that can contribute most in applying nature-based solutions to health and urban resilience. We need innovative governance form related to urban settlements, particularly for spatial planning. We need to accelerate a green circular economy, promoting jobs and business using innovation in cities with improved design, consumption and procurement standards, and in offering urban youth opportunities for start-ups that facilitate sustainability.

Malcolm Johnson indicated that almost half of the world’s population, about 3.6 billion people, remains offline. Having access to affordable Internet remains a prominent challenge for many. Digital technologies and ICTs are key enablers for accelerating sustainability efforts and climate actions in cities, from enhancing operational efficiency of urban complexities and infrastructure to improving accessibility to essential services and bring the benefits of nature to all people.

Dr. Bambang Susantono pointed out that in order to address COVID-19 impacts in cities, immediate actions should enable creating better social protection for the most vulnerable groups, and provision of better urban services and infrastructure. Strategic actions involve revisiting urban planning systems, and strategies to strengthen the financial sustainability of cities and increase the governance capacity of various stakeholders.



Keynote speakers

Zhang Xinsheng stressed that the evidence is crystal clear that our planet is in trouble and therefore we are in trouble too. We must promote a green recovery with nature and people at its heart. An investment in the health of our planet is an investment in our own future. In the meantime, we must adopt nature-based solutions to address pressing urban challenges.

Satya Tripathi emphasized that we need nature more than ever and we need to work with nature to optimize health and prevent future pandemics. We must urgently scale up and accelerate collaboration on conserving, restoring and using biodiversity fairly and sustainably. We need to recalibrate our relationship with the animal world to slow the rising tide of zoonotic diseases, like COVID-19. If we shift investments and subsidies from fossil fuels to renewables, we can slow climate change, cut air pollution, create sustainable jobs and power communities across the world.



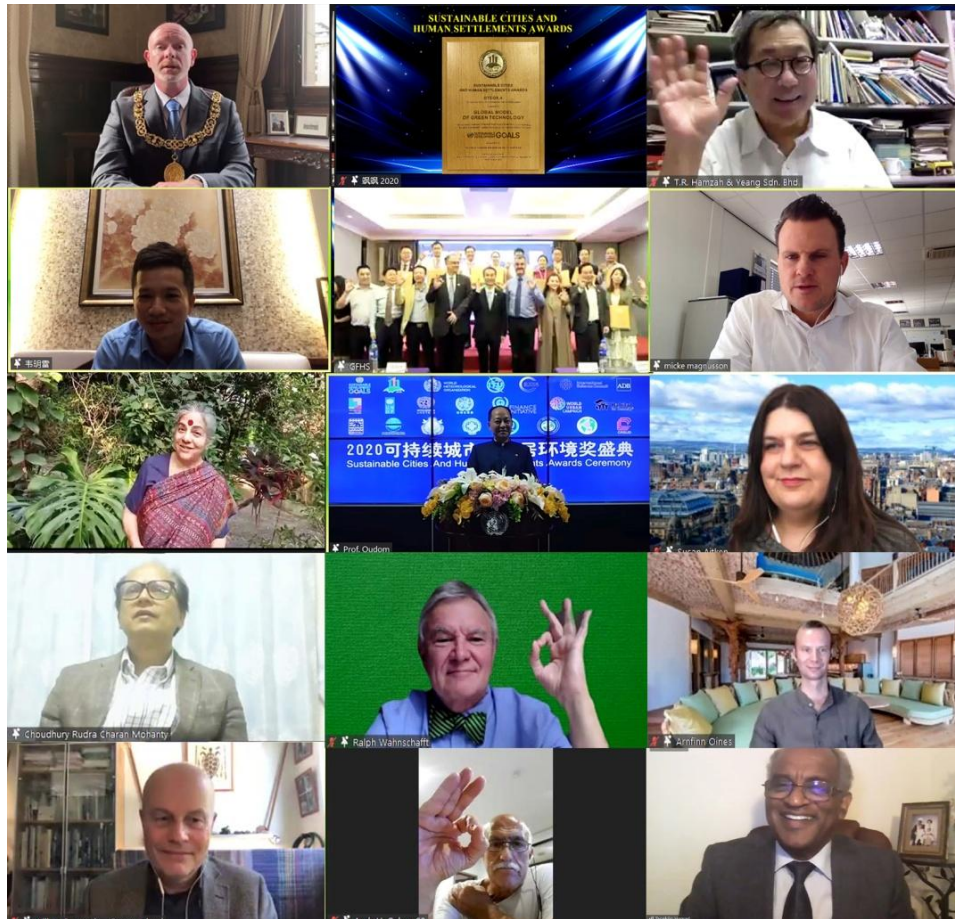
High-level Dialogue

Dr. Vandana Shiva shared that the well being of people is dependent on the well being of the Earth. Food is the connector which links humans to other species, urban settlements to the countryside. Sustainable food systems can address the multiple crises - the climate emergency, the health emergency, the livelihood, poverty and hunger emergency.

In his closing remarks, GFHS Secretary General Lu Haifeng underlined the need to kick-start green development revolution, green city revolution and green cultural revolution on a global scale. Against the background of Covid-19, international community must make concerted efforts in accelerating the implementation of the global conventions and agendas, particularly "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", and reducing and containing ecological and climate disasters. Lu also proposed to formulate post-2030 "Green Revolution, Healthy Planet Agenda", and take decisive actions to realize a green transformation and secure a promising future.

COVID-19 that is continuing to cause human tragedy, social upheaval and economic turmoil across the globe can be considered as a once-in-a-century crisis of ecological security and public health. United Nations Secretary General António Guterres emphasized in the latest UN Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World: "Now is the time to rethink and reshape the urban world. Now is the moment to adapt to the reality of this and future pandemics. Now is our chance to recover better, by building more resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities."

Being a timely action to implement the UN Policy Brief, the two-day event addressed important topics on urgent urban issues including preserving and sustainably managing biodiversity and guaranteeing ecological security; integrated climate, hydrology and environment services for sustainable cities; building urban resilience to climate change; financing for resilient urban infrastructure; smart, sustainable cities and communities; International Green Model City Initiative; adaptable buildings and resilient cities; post-crisis healthy and anti-fragile cities; blue economy and healthy ocean; blockchain technology and smart urban governance; energy-efficient and sustainable housing; and a resilient, inclusive, gender-equal and green economic recovery. The forum has yielded fruitful outcomes and made significant contribution to the process of restoring people's well-being, promoting green recovery and change in businesses, cities and even countries, and preserving and sustainably managing biodiversity, thereby making cities and human settlements safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable, and achieving our vision of a healthy planet.



Awardees at Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements Awards Ceremony 2020

The two-day event was grandly concluded with the “Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements Awards Ceremony 2020” (SCAHS 2020) which recognized 19 organizations and individuals from around the globe for their excellence in sustainable development practices and innovations. The awardees include city of Glasgow, the host of next UN Climate Change Conference; Dr. Vandana Shiva, eminent scientist, writer, and environmental philosopher, India; Dato’ Dr. Ken Yeang, well-known architect, ecologist, planner and author, Malaysia; Soneva Fushi – the carbon neutral tourism resort in Maldives; DyeCoo, the inventor of zero-water and zero-chemical dyeing technology; TerraCycle, an innovative recycling enterprise from the United States; Country Garden Forest City; The Commonland from the Netherlands; DP Architects from Singapore, and others (The complete list of awardees can be accessed here: <http://www.gfhsforum.org/award>). At a moment when the fate of mankind is at stake, it is of much significance for these sustainability leaders to influence more stakeholders to make joint endeavor towards sustainable development.

By the News and Information Department, GFHS