

UNITED FOR SMART SUSTAINABLE CITIES

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OPENING REMARKS

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Distinguished colleagues and friends,

I hope that you and your families are all in good health and good spirit.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you today to the sixth annual United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) Meeting. Allow me to thank ITU, UNECE and UN-Habitat for organizing this meeting virtually.

It is a privilege indeed to continue this dialogue on smart sustainable cities, together with key partners within the UN ecosystem, the U4SSC Vice Chairmen, Leaders of the Thematic Groups and U4SSC participants.

As majority of the world's population now live in cities, these areas are considered the epicentres of human activity and interaction.

With nearly 68% of the global population projected to live in cities by 2050, it is essential to plan for growth and provide the basic services, infrastructure, and affordable housing for the expanding populations.

Keeping quality of life at the centre of urban planning, information and communication technologies (ICTs) hold the potential to facilitate progress to a sustainable environment, and foster interaction with the relevant authorities to overcome challenges relating to carbon intensive infrastructures, security, urban sprawl, pollution and traffic congestion.

Though cities cover only 3 percent of Earth's surface, they generate more than 60 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. In this scenario, cities are a part of the problem and must strive to play a central role in addressing the root causes of climate change and prepare for resilience to counter-balance the negative impacts.

Realizing this, COP26 last month explored how cities can address climatic emergencies to lead the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy and deliver on the targets of the Paris Agreement. COP26 also witnessed the leading and emerging economies of the world join forces for long-term climate-smart planning by leveraging technological innovation and financing.

These discussions have again brought *Smart and Sustainable Cities* to the centre-stage for the implementation of smart solutions for urban energy, mobility and water systems for moving towards “net-zero emissions”.

The drive for tech-centric sustainable urbanism is also well-enshrined in the New Urban Agenda, which also acknowledged the importance of smart cities in optimizing resources and making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable in line with Sustainable Development Goal 11.

Understanding the range of interdependencies among these global agendas, the U4SSC plays a key role in unlocking the potential of emerging technologies in the urban space, across different verticals.

The smart city vision presented by this initiative is focussed on driving digital transformation as it inculcates the use of emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, digital twin, edge computing, blockchain among others to build a sustainable ecosystem, which is energy efficient, resilient and carbon neutral.

Further, through its various Thematic Groups, U4SSC has been examining the trajectory of use of these disruptive technologies, in supporting data collection and decision-making processes to allocate resources efficiently, conduct operations, evaluate situations objectively and enhance city infrastructures.

Since the last U4SSC Meeting in October 2020, we have come a long way. Within the last one year, with the active support of our UN stakeholders and Thematic Group Leaders, we have launched six publications:

- 1) Blockchain for smart sustainable cities
- 2) Simple ways to be smart
- 3) Guidelines on tools and mechanisms to finance smart sustainable cities projects

And today we are pleased to launch three new additional deliverables:

- 4) Digital solutions for integrated city management and use cases
- 5) Compendium of survey results on integrated digital solutions for city platforms around the world
- 6) Smart public health emergency management and ICT implementations

This would not have been possible without the relentless efforts of the Leaders and of our participants who have continuously contributed to the development of these reports.

During today's event, as the stepping-stone for the next phase for U4SSC, we will be provided an overview of the existing deliverables under development. We know from experience that such meetings of minds open up new horizons of innovation and paves the way for new partnerships necessary to address growing challenges in the urban space.

With the platform bestowed to us by U4SSC, we will continue to take these challenges head-on and provide an open forum for discussions and deliver guidance to urban stakeholders to strengthen SSC landscape in keeping with international conventions.

Thank you all for your attention and I wish you all a fruitful meeting ahead.