UNITED FOR SMART SUSTAINABLE CITIES MEETING

7 DECEMBER 2021

OPENING REMARKS

MALCOLM JOHNSON,
DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL, ITU

Distinguished Chairman, UN Partners and Participants,

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening and welcome to this the sixth meeting of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) initiative organized jointly by ITU, UNECE and UN-Habitat.

This reminds me of when I launched the U4SSC initiative in the beautiful venue of the Temple of Hadrian in Rome on 18 May 2016 together with UNECE. It was a very happy occasion and one full of optimism. Soon afterwards, 15 more UN organisations joined the initiative.

Now, as we struggle with the challenges of the Covid pandemic, we have to work hard to ensure that the substantial strides achieved over the last 5 years by the initiative are maintained.

Rapid urbanization has put a considerable strain on the aging urban infrastructures and services, leading to problems of pollution, energy shortages, inadequate housing, unemployment and a lack of educational and healthcare facilities. As a response to these challenges, since the mid-1980s, technology-centric solutions have been put forward worldwide to make cities more resilient and more sustainable. The emergence of digital technologies, and the advancements in emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Blockchain and Digital Twin have further sped this transformation into the 21st century.

The concept of smart cities has been hailed for its people-oriented approach to resource management and the provision of innovative urban services to improve the quality of life of city inhabitants. Unfortunately, the pandemic has forced governments to adopt measures reserved for large-scale health emergencies increasing the financial burden on their economies, and delaying progress on the SDGs and the implementation of smart city projects.

Furthermore, effective governance mechanisms are essential for facilitating sustainable urban growth. Such governance systems need to be inclusive with a focus on digital transformation so as to establish people-centred, smart sustainable cities. This will be a part of the next phase of U4SSC's work relating to digital transformation and the drive for smart city transitions.

Understanding the complex nature of urban challenges, the U4SSC has been exploring different organizational configurations, supported by emerging technologies, to provide cities with the intelligence for planning, modelling and simulation to facilitate economic

recovery in the post-COVID era. These aspects are being covered exclusively under the U4SSC Thematic Group on Economic recovery in cities and urban resilience building.

Maintaining the tempo of guiding smart city stakeholders, U4SSC has also been covering various other topics, including procurement, resource allocation and effective coordination for the adoption of emerging technologies. The Thematic Group on City Platforms has achieved an ambitious series of deliverables on existing solutions for integrated city management and health emergencies.

To foster the integration of AI into urban services, U4SSC is also working on the development of a set of "Guiding principles for artificial intelligence in cities", which provide insights for designing AI implementation strategies and oversight of AI-based urban services.

The work within U4SSC is complemented by the international standardization work of ITU-T Study Group 20 on IoT, Smart Cities and Communities which covers a range of topics relating to Big Data, smart city e-services and deployment plans.

I am very pleased with the success of the U4SSC initiative over the last 5 years. It has launched more than 11 Reports and its KPIs have been implemented in more than 150 cities worldwide.

This collaboration has indeed proved the point – many hands make light work!

We are indebted to our partners and the Thematic Group Leaders and other experts for their dedication, interest and support to U4SSC, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration with you for the advancement of the smart and sustainable city ecosystem.

Last month at COP-26, we witnessed a surge in the number of discussions relating to the empowerment of urban strategies through techno-centric planning. Many of these discussions culminated in the strong commitment from key stakeholders to establish people-centred smart cities to ensure the sustainability and resilience of such ecosystems for our future generations.

So, let us aim to build on the optimistic outcome of COP26 and make the most of the time allotted to us today to continue our journey towards attaining the SDGs, as well as the targets in the Paris Agreement and Glasgow Climate Pact.

Thank you and I wish you all for an enjoyable and successful day.