

## 17th Global Forum on Human Settlements

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### Remarks

Reaching #zeroclimatedisasters

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Thank you very much for that warm introduction.

On behalf of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, it is my pleasure to deliver these remarks for today's session of this **17<sup>th</sup> Global Forum on Human Settlements**, which is focused on **Resilient Cities and Coastal Areas: Policies, Technologies, and Practices**.

The theme of my presentation – **Reaching #zeroclimatedisasters** – may at first glance appear overly ambitious or perhaps even unrealistic.

I am of a different mind: I firmly believe that this ambition is absolutely achievable, is absolutely doable and is absolutely within our grasp ***IF – and yes, it is a big IF –*** we transform our thinking and our action.

In other words, **'Yes We Can'** reach a point in which everyone has a future where they are not threatened by disasters .... If we so choose.

So where do we currently stand? Well, I don't think this audience needs much reminding of the dire state of affairs we as a global community find ourselves as we approach the midway point of the overall 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Of all the billions – perhaps even trillions – of words spoken and written about the Climate Emergency, I doubt there is a better and more accurate sentence than the one delivered by the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at

last month's COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt when he said: **'We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.'**

This statement is as damning as it is accurate.

We already have the understanding and the tools at our disposal to not only take our foot off the accelerator but quickly reverse course and embark on our journey in the opposite direction towards **#zeroclimatedisasters**.

What is missing is the political and financial will – and greater collective ambition – to seize the moment for a future without climate disasters before our window of opportunity slams shut.

This is why my organization UNDRR is seeking to ramp up global efforts to reach **#zeroclimatedisasters**.

To get there requires a two-track approach. We need to rapidly reduce emissions while at the same transform our ambition and action in terms of climate change adaptation.

Of course, it is a huge ask, so I would like to focus on one immediate step we can take to generate some much-needed momentum to reach **#zeroclimatedisasters**.

That is to quickly Provide Early Warning Systems for All People on our planet.

In the past few months, we have witnessed the worst climate disaster in recorded history as massive floods devastated much of Pakistan.

The country's Prime Minister His Excellency Muhammad Sharif told the UN General Assembly 'Life in Pakistan has changed forever' as he recounted the unprecedented tragedy unfolding in his country.

Perhaps the only ray of hope from this disaster is the fact that the death toll could have been much higher but for the early warnings issued by the Pakistani authorities.

One-third of the world's population are still not covered by early warning systems. Most of these people live in the urban areas of least developed countries and small island developing states. In Africa, 60% of the population lacks coverage.

As extreme weather events become more common around the world, this means hundreds of millions are being put in harm's way. This is unacceptable.

At COP27, UN Secretary-General Guterres launched the UN's Early Warnings for All Action Plan so that in this era of escalating climate risk, everyone on earth is covered by such systems by 2027.

At first glance, the \$3.1 billion headline cost of the initiative may seem a little steep.

But then pause for moment ... and consider that this is the equivalent of just **50 cents per person per year for the next 5 years.**

When one digests those figures, it is clear that Early Warnings for All – instead of being a cost – is in fact a tremendous investment in resilient and sustainable development.

The cost-benefit ratio is overwhelmingly clear.

On 13 October – the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction – the World Meteorological Organization and UNDRR issued a report that highlighted how countries that substantially increase the coverage of their early warning systems have nearly eight times lower disaster mortality than those with limited coverage.

This is why the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the global blueprint to reduce disaster risks and losses adopted by UN Member States in 2015, sets a global target to expand early warning systems by 2030.

The most effective systems:

- Are people-centred
- Able to detect different hazards that may occur alone, simultaneously or cascade, and

- Empower people to initiate appropriate action to protect themselves and their families based on understandable and actionable warning messages.

Such systems utilize the three key elements of the overall theme of today's session enabling **policies**, applicable **technologies**, and scalable **practice**.

**Aggregating, amplifying** and most importantly **accelerating** implementation of such climate and disaster risk reduction is why UNDRR, along with 11 core partners, launched **Making Cities Resilient 2030**.

**MCR2030**, as it is commonly known, is a global collaboration that supports municipalities around the world to strengthen their climate and disaster resilience. It aims to Leave No Municipality Behind in this ambition.

As of today, the partnership has mobilized more than 1,460 local governments, representing 454 million people, that have committed to reduce their disaster and climate risk.

It is a global collaboration that comprises a 'who's who' of partners with unmatched expertise and experience in supporting greater urban resilience.

One of MCR2030's great strengths is it facilitates the **power of peer-to-peer exchange** between municipalities around the world. Let me follow this lead and share three examples of how cities are scaling up their ambition and action to move from climate risk to resilience.

Let me start with Wroclaw (**pronounced Vratslav**), in Poland – a city that this year has received more than 250,000 refugees from the war in neighbouring Ukraine and yet – despite this immense challenge – is still committed to its green agenda.

Earlier, I talked about political will. The leadership in Wroclaw is showing what this really means in practice.

Last month, I was inspired to listen to Wroclaw's Deputy Mayor Mr Jakub (**pronounced Yakub**) Mazur.

Mr Mazur, as well as being a city leader, is one of tens of thousands of Wroclaw residents who have opened their doors to welcome refugees from Ukraine. In Mr Mazur's case, his family has housed 4 Ukrainian families since February.

Explaining his city's resilience ambitions, Mr Mazur said the following:

'Even in this very demanding period, I have high hopes that we remain united in this vision of a green future – We are coping as a society, not just a coping government and that makes me very proud. It can work if all sectors come together – health, education, and others – to take short-term action towards a longer-term strategy. This includes remaining on our green track. We can only do this together within the city and beyond, including international collaboration.'

Truly inspiring words from a municipal leader who believes that his city and others are on the frontline of opportunity despite an onslaught of consecutive and compounding challenges.

Second, let us move from Europe to the Americas. Almost 20 years ago, the city of Campinas in Brazil experienced severe storms and flooding. The impact was so devastating that it prompted a transformation on two fronts with the municipality institutionalizing and mainstreaming the resilience agenda into its risk governance and local development planning across all sectors.

The results on the ground have been impressive. Since the 2003 disaster, the number of the city's districts exposed to flooding and landslides has reduced significantly from 75 to 30 – a decrease of 64 percent.

And thirdly, let us again shift continents again, this time to North-East Asia and the Korean city of Incheon.

As periods of extreme temperature become more common, the coastal city has decided to get ahead of the hazard and set a goal of Zero Heatwave Casualties and Damage'.

It uses Big Data to focus resources on the most vulnerable and exposed parts of the city. To re-enforce this effort, it has also increased its heatwave management

funding 20 percent and established a team of 7,000 'Heatwave Helpers' who act as first responders during danger periods.

Incheon's heatwave plan goes hand-in-hand with a comprehensive flood management strategy. Earlier this year, the city coped relatively well as it experienced its heaviest rains in 115 years.

Cities that take such action are better able to cope with extreme weather events. Yes, they are challenged, but they are **not** overwhelmed.

These examples demonstrate that 'Yes We Can' live in a world of **#zeroclimatedisasters** – if we decide it is a goal worth reaching.

At the same time, the three examples point to the uncomfortable fact that the same opportunities and progress are not as apparent in many cities in least developed countries and small island developing states.

This clearly needs to change and change fast. The role of international partnership that supports local leadership and capacity is a critical part of the change required.

So, in conclusion, hazards do not have to become disasters that devastate.

And the power to prevent disasters lies in our own actions ... or inactions.

It is true that nothing short of a transformative approach is needed.

But when anyone asks Can We Reach #zeroclimatedisasters?

My answer is: Yes, With Political and Financial Will, We Will Indeed.

Thank you very much.