

Breakfast Dialogue on The Future of Cities

Opening Remarks by H. E. Michal Mlynár

Post-Pandemic cities

Thursday June 25th 2021, 8:30 am-10:00 am

(Thank you Elizabeth,)

Excellencies, dear friends,

In March this year we marked 1 year since the WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic with cities on the frontline of this crisis, with dwindling economic activity, high rates of infection and inadequate resources.

Cities are at the center of any pandemic, as they have always been during history. Unfortunately, We had a chance to see it with our own eyes, in one of the biggest cities in the world.

(From empty subway, vacant streets, closed restaurants to no traffic jams.)

The question that arose at the begging of the pandemic “If cities will survive the coronavirus?” is answered. They have survived. In fact, history shows that people often moved to cities after pandemics because of the better job opportunities and the higher wages they offered after the sudden drop in population. The crisis may provide a short window for our unaffordable, hyper gentrified cities to reset and to reenergize their creative scenes.

The number of people living in urban areas has grown more than fivefold since the year 1950. Today, half of the world’s population lives in cities and this percentage will continue growing. Implications of such „urban mushrooming“ have direct impact on the health and well-being of our people, our economies, and our planet.

Projected increase of **2,5 billion people moving to cities** over next 3 decades will be extraordinary challenge we will have to face, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, food supply or even waste management.

Cities already account for **70% of greenhouse gas emissions**, extensive traffic and waste production are just a few additional challenges to be mentioned.

Inclusiveness and local action are the key enablers that need to be stressed. We need to take a look at a developing countries, since **95% of urban expansion** in the **next decades** is foreseen to take place **in developing world**.

I would like to briefly highlight few important points we need to consider and talk about:

- **Role of youth;** Youth has to be involved in these processes in a meaningful and substantial way.
- **Inequality;** The crisis strikingly exposed inequality across people and places, especially in large cities, where vulnerable groups such as migrants, the poor, women and the elderly were hit hard
- **People centered approach;** People need to be at our center of interest. Just to mention something unimaginable for us, is that one billion people worldwide live in slums, making social distancing and handwashing difficult.

Last but not least,

- **Trust;** Trust as a key component. COVID-19 bears implications for **governance**, with citizens' **trust in governments** increasing in some countries, especially for local politicians, and decreasing in others. For governments to help, people need to trust their politicians.

The way in which we **design and build our cities** will be **critical** in the near future and therefore the **role of UN Habitat** is irreplaceable in this context. Urbanization has to be managed in an **inclusive** and **resource-efficient way**.

The pandemic is expected to fundamentally alter how cities are managed/governed in the future. In this regard, actions taken within the next few years are important and determine whether post-COVID cities will be developed and managed in a more sustainable manner. As cities start to recover, their main priority will probably be economic development. However, it is essential to make sure that, in addition to economic development, social and environmental **dimensions of sustainability** will also be considered.

What we need to do at this point is to look what has been working and what is not and take a lesson from the field and from our experiences. This is an unique opportunity to **BUILD BACK BETTER**, so let's **USE IT**.

I thank you.