



Ambassador Chowdhury, friends and colleagues:

I am very pleased to join you this morning to offer a few words of welcome to this critically important forum.

I'd like to congratulate our hosts for 15 years of providing a platform for high-level dialogue on the building of sustainable cities and human settlements.

We meet at a critical time in human history – a time that has echoes from our past. A century ago the First World War and a global flu pandemic brought death and destruction to countless millions the world over.

Today, a hundred plus years later we find ourselves at a similar crossroads.

We have a global pandemic that has already infected millions. And while the climate change crisis we are currently dealing with may not be in the same category as a military conflict, if we lose the battle to bring it under control, we know there will be an extremely negative outcome for countless millions.

We are not powerless in the face of these challenges—we can head off disaster. But it will require clear thinking, great determination, and courage on the part of all stakeholders to do the right thing.



As UN Secretary General Guterres put it recently¹:

“We have a choice: business as usual, leading to further calamity; or we can use the recovery from COVID-19 to provide a real opportunity to put the world on a sustainable path.”

I couldn't agree more. But I would also add this.

As nations rush to respond to the immediate crisis of COVID, they must recognize that the impacts of climate change **also** demand an urgent response.

The climate crisis isn't some pending disaster waiting to happen—it is on our doorsteps right now. If we look at last year alone, catastrophic fires and storms coupled with unprecedented temperatures cost the world \$150 billion.

Clearly much work remains to be done to bring climate change under control.

Climate Change and The Urban Setting

Nowhere is the work more important than in our urban centres. This is where the climate battle **must** be won. It is not hard to understand why. The statistics and trend lines are telling.

¹<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1071982#:~:text=Speaking%20at%20the%20launch%20of,rise%20to%201.5%20degree%20Celsius.>



By 2050 nearly 7 of 10 people in the world will live in cities.²

With up to 80 percent of global GDP generated in urban centres there is no doubt they are the engines of economic prosperity. But those same centres are also significant drivers of climate change.

Some of the communities most vulnerable to climate change, are the urban poor. Frequently they are people living in areas with a high risk of flooding, landslides and sea level rise. Their communities often have limited means to withstand such extreme climate conditions.

It is perhaps not surprising then, that a recent World Bank report³ stated that internal climate migrants are rapidly becoming the human face of climate change.

By 2050—in just three regions—climate change could force more than 143 million people to move within their own countries. This migration will then accelerate unless there are significant cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and robust development action.

Rising to the challenge, cities and local governments around the world have made climate commitments at home and abroad - through global campaigns such as those launched by, among others:

² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview>

³“Rigaud, Kanta Kumari; de Sherbinin, Alex; Jones, Bryan; Bergmann, Jonas; Clement, Viviane; Ober, Kayly; Schewe, Jacob; Adamo, Susana; McCusker, Brent; Heuser, Silke; Midgley, Amelia. 2018. Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29461> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.”



- ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability,
- United Cities for Local Governments (UCLG),
- the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group,
- the Making Cities Resilient Campaign (led by UNDRR) and,
- most recently, through the new Compact of Mayors.

In short, cities and like-minded organizations are taking action to build up the strength of urban centres. And progress is being made in areas such as land-use planning, building resilient infrastructure, enhancing early warning systems, strengthening governance for resilience and improving the living conditions of the poor.

But city, regional, and national governments can't do it alone. We have long recognized the need for businesses—and other non-State actors—to join with governments to fulfill the Paris Agreement and achieve a 1.5-degree future. This is a key part of what we call inclusive multilateralism.

The unique expertise of the private sector can form an important part of the multi-sectoral partnership that is required between government and non-government actors.

We see this, for example, in the **Private Sector Initiative**⁴ of the Nairobi Work Program, which aims to kick-start private sector engagement in climate change adaptation efforts.

It provides a platform for the private sector to showcase and exchange

⁴ <https://unfccc.int/topics/resilience/resources/adaptation-private-sector>



best practices and experiences—with respect to their adaptation efforts as well as in the most vulnerable countries and communities around the world.

We see it in our **Race to Zero** initiative, which seeks to rally leadership and support from businesses, cities, regions, and investors for a zero carbon recovery that creates jobs, and promotes sustainable growth.

We also recognize the role of inclusive multilateralism when it comes to helping cities and communities around the world make the **energy transformation** we so urgently need.

When I addressed ICLEI just a few days ago I acknowledged the challenges of going green, but suggested they were not insurmountable.

It will require investments that enable the scaling up of the number - and efficiency - of renewables. That in turn will require **innovation** in building flexible power grids, energy storage, green hydrogen, and many other clean energy technologies and enabling infrastructures.

I am confident that we can do this. And if we do - the payoffs in job creation could be huge. An **energy system fit for the 21st-century would not just result in decarbonisation - but could also push jobs in the renewable sector to 42 million by 2050.⁵**

⁵ IRENA's recent *Global Renewables Outlook*



However, 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.

Domestically, this must be driven by national, state and local governments.

Internationally it means making climate decisions that improve the lives of *everyone* – not just a few favoured nations. And this means fulfilling commitments under the Paris Agreement, including areas related to finance, technology transfer and capacity-building.

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.

The good news is that under the Paris Agreement, approximately two thirds of all countries have urban content in their Nationally Determined Contributions.

Of these, 113 out of 164 countries have focused on adaptation in human settlements. Translating these commitments to national plans and



strategies is crucial in the coming years.⁶It's why we need to see even stronger commitments reflected in this next round of NDCs due in 2020.

Ladies and gentlemen;

Working with non-State actors to build a framework for more meaningful engagement in order to drive more robust climate action is essential.

We have the roadmap to get there. The Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda give the world a solid blueprint for “building forward”.

I know that with determination we can get there. Together.

Thank you.

⁶ <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/Documents/Supplements/NAP-Human%20Settlement.pdf>