



**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Opening Statement**

**by**

**Ms. Tatiana Molcean**

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**2024 Forum of Mayors, Cities Summit of the Future**

**Geneva, 30 September 2024**

Excellencies,

Esteemed colleagues,

Mayors and deputy mayors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you all to the Fourth Forum of Mayors' meeting. I am deeply honored to see so many of you gathered here today from every corner of the globe.

This year, the Forum proudly hosts more than 70 cities. This includes 45 mayors and deputy mayors officially selected to participate in this Forum. We are happy also to welcome other city representatives that decided to join us to share their experiences with us and contribute to this meeting. Our participants range from major metropolitan centers to mid-sized cities. This diverse representation underscores the Forum's truly global reach, spanning from the South to the North, and from the East to the West. The logo of the Forum, a "city-world", depicts well the global outreach of the event this year.

Let me first take a moment to thank our partners, without whose support the event would not be possible.

First, my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General. Through his video message from New York, he has acknowledged the crucial role that you, the mayors, play in shaping a new, expanded, reinvigorated, and inclusive multilateralism. We are actively collaborating with his office to strengthen this Forum and formalize your participation in the work of the UN.

I also extend my gratitude to the four other UN Regional Commissions. This year's global representation is once again the result of our highly successful collaboration. Many thanks for your invaluable support and active participation in the Forum.

Let me also mention our partners who are on the podium with me today for their unwavering support at the highest level.

The presence of the Director General of UNOG highlights how the Forum has become a significant feature of international Geneva and we are grateful for this recognition.

UN-Habitat has been a long-term partner, and we deeply appreciate their commitment, which underscores the Forum's relevance to the global urban agenda.

---

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, though a more recent partner, has quickly become one of our most valued collaborators. We are truly grateful for the positive promotion of the Forum in Europe and overseas. Your voice has been heard and the overall interest in this forum has grown thanks to your action.

We are also honored to welcome for the first time United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). I had the privilege of participating in their World Assembly on September 19<sup>th</sup> and I am convinced that forging stronger ties between the Forum, the Regional Commissions, and UCLG is essential for advancing the localization of the SDGs. This collaboration will also help enhance and strengthen the role of local and regional authorities within the UN system, in their own right. We look forward to this meaningful cooperation.

This year, we are also honored to welcome International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for the first time. Their presence is a powerful reminder of the crucial role cities play in the environmental agenda.

There is also our official partner, the Global Cities Hub. Their unwavering support has been crucial in facilitating numerous aspects of the Forum, including organizing special events, ensuring the participation and travel of many mayors from beyond the UNECE region, and providing assistance and services for the next two days.

A very special thank you to you the mayors and in particular to the Bureau of the Forum, the mayors of Skopje, Braga, Glasgow, and Geneva. Your tireless efforts and the dedication of your teams throughout the year have been instrumental in making this meeting possible.

I am also deeply grateful to our Advocate, Architect Norman Foster, who has generously leveraged his influence and reach in support of this cause. Your dedication has been a tremendous source of motivation.

Last but certainly not least, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our sponsors. The Forum of Mayors is an extrabudgetary effort, made possible with the generous support of Switzerland, Italy, and Hungary. I sincerely hope that more countries will be inspired to follow their example and continue to support this unique body the years to come.

---

Last week, I attended the Summit of the Future in New York. The Summit established the Pact of the Future, providing a framework to guide global efforts

---

in addressing critical and emerging issues such as climate action, digital transformation, social inclusion, and international cooperation and governance. This week, it is the turn of cities to engage with the Pact. The ambitious goals outlined in this document cannot be achieved without active contributions from local and regional authorities. Therefore, we have renamed this fourth edition of the Forum as the “Cities Summit of the Future”. We are eager to hear from you, the mayors, on how you can support the implementation of the Pact, the challenges you foresee, and the strategies you propose to overcome them.

Over the past months, we have asked you to draft and agree upon a statement that reflects your perspectives on this important topic and emphasizes your role in shaping the future. I hope this statement will be adopted at this meeting. I am pleased to observe that it includes many critical elements for a renewed and inclusive multilateralism.

As the closest level of government to the people, you have a unique understanding of your communities, including the interactions, strengths, and weaknesses of the various actors within your territories. You are aware of the opportunities and obstacles that lie ahead. Without your efforts to "localize the SDGs," meaningful progress towards the 2030 Agenda would be unattainable.

Firstly, the environmental agenda is profoundly connected to urban resilience and sustainable urban planning. Unchecked growth and consumption have expanded our urban footprints to unsustainable levels. It is crucial that we rethink and redesign our cities to conserve energy, protect nature, and preserve soil and land.

Urban actions also significantly influence social development. Local authorities bear a vital responsibility not only in addressing gender and youth issues but also in fostering a peaceful, harmonious, and diverse society.

Ensuring security and eliminating violence and armed conflict begins at the urban level. It is through nurturing relationships with our neighbors, fostering community harmony, and respecting the diversity of all citizens that we build healthy, vibrant, and peaceful towns and cities.

Urban progress will increasingly depend on technology. The term "smart city" underscores how science, technology, and innovation—including artificial intelligence—can empower cities to drive development. It is essential that cities use technology to support and benefit their citizens, fostering truly people-smart and people-centered urban development. Genuine smart cities are those that address and reduce inequalities, enhance human rights, improve cybersecurity, and promote ethical innovation. Technology should act as a unifier, not a divider.

---

It must serve as an equalizer, ensuring that all citizens benefit from its advancements.

Last, but certainly not least, a central theme in the Pact for the Future and in this meeting is the issue of governance, and the involvement of local and regional authorities in the work of the United Nations. As you, the mayors, have emphasized in your draft statement, this Forum serves as an effective model for cities to exchange knowledge, best practices, and local solutions. More importantly, it provides a platform for cities to engage in the work of the UN, to contribute to declarations and statements, and to make recommendations to member States. This participation ensures that local and regional authorities are recognized as both *de facto* and *de jure* active actors within the UN system.

The Forum represents maybe a small but certainly a significant step toward transforming global governance, and I am grateful to each of you for making this possible.

As requested by the mayors, it will be my honor to convey your statement to the UN Secretary-General. This will inform him of our efforts to enhance the engagement of local and regional authorities in UN intergovernmental bodies and processes, contributing to a stronger and more inclusive global governance framework.

Before I conclude, I would like to quickly mention some UNECE activities which are very relevant to mayors, and invite you to join them:

- First, our Trees in Cities Challenge, which this year achieved a remarkable milestone: **19 million trees planted in nearly 100 cities**. This remains a key global initiative dedicated to local resilience, the SDGs and climate action.
- Second, the Coalition on Trees in Dry Cities, a platform I launched at COP-28 in Dubai. Open to cities, governments, international organizations, and NGOs, this platform provides **targeted support** to cities facing the unique challenges of dry climates and dry seasons.

Our UNECE Forest team will be available during the next two days to provide more information and help you join this inspiring and growing community of cities committed to urban greening.

Thank you all once again for your presence here. I wish you a productive and engaging meeting.

---

-----