

Media Update

30 October 2021

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD CITIES DAY 2021
31 October 2021

Cities are hubs of innovation and human ingenuity — and potential centres for transformative action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and build a zero-carbon, climate-resilient and socially just world.

The theme of this year's World Cities Day, 'Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience', comes at a time when cities must be more resilient than ever before. They have been epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic and are on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Globally, over 1 billion people live in informal settlements, with 70 per cent highly vulnerable to climate change. Sea level rise could put more than 800 million people in coastal cities at direct risk by 2050. Yet just 9% of climate finance to cities goes to adaptation and resilience, and cities in developing countries receive far less than those in developed countries. This must change — half of all climate finance should be dedicated to adaptation.

We need a people-centred and inclusive approach to planning, building and managing cities. Resilient infrastructure, early warning systems and financial instruments to mitigate risks are crucial tools as cities seek to adapt and protect the lives and livelihoods of their residents.

Cities can lead the way in recovering better from the pandemic, reducing emissions at the scale and speed the world needs, and securing a resilient future for billions.

On World Cities Day, let us renew our resolve to confront urban challenges, mitigate risks, and forge lasting solutions. Together, we can transform our cities, and thereby transform our world.

UN-Habitat

PRESS RELEASE

World Cities Day

UN Habitat organized seminar on Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience and Amplifying Pakistan's Efforts and Young Voices to Echo at COP26

UN-Habitat Pakistan collaborated with the Ministry of Climate Change, SheherSaaz and COMSATS University to celebrate World Cities Day 2021. The event titled “*Urban Thinkers Campus: Amplifying Pakistan's Efforts and Young Voices*” was aimed to open space for critical exchange between urban researchers, professionals, and decision-makers who believe that urbanization is an opportunity and can lead to positive urban transformations. It was also intended as a platform to build consensus in addressing urbanization challenges and proposing solutions to urban futures. For this year, the theme of UTC is set to present, discuss and deliver climate action solutions.

The event commenced with a welcome address from Ms. Almas Shakoor (Executive Director, SheherSaaz) where she highlighted the vulnerability of Pakistan to the impacts of climate change, despite contributing the least to greenhouse gas emissions. Ms. Shakur also shed light on the demographics, stating 63% of the population in Pakistan is comprised of young people ageing between 15 and 33 years, stressing the dire need to include the young generation in the fight towards climate change.

Following, the keynote speech was delivered by Mr. Jawed Ali Khan (HPM, UN-Habitat Pakistan) where he highlighted the critical challenges due to rapid urbanization, stating it has doubled between 1998 and 2017. He elaborated on some of the challenges such as housing deficit due to the widening gap between housing supply and demand, leading to major difficulties in urban life.

Additionally, he stated that if these issues go unchecked, major cities will be at a verge of deterioration within the coming decade. He went on to reiterate the catastrophic threats from glacial melts, floods and droughts, water scarcity, urban flooding, and urban heat island phenomenon in Pakistani cities despite its miniscule contribution towards greenhouse gas emissions. Lastly, Mr. Jawed called attention to some of great initiatives taken by the Government of Pakistan to overcome the impacts of climate change namely: localization of the SDGs in the local context, 10 billion Tree Plantation Programme, manufacturing of electric vehicles as well as modernized mass transit system, metro buses and metro trains, development of Green Building Code for Pakistan and adoption of green building practices in the Prime Ministers 5 Million Housing Programme. Mr. Jawed concluded with an optimistic note stating the impacts of climate change can be minimized through adoption of science-based solutions and innovation as well as building partnerships for inclusive, resilient, and sustainable solutions.

Mr. Shahzad Malik (Dean faculty of engineering, COMSATS) gave remarks focused on the need to sensitize the public and the youth to some very critical issues in the wake of climate change such as fossil fuel consumption. He stressed that to be able to take concrete action, we must start from ourselves. Mr. Shahid then went on to appreciate the efforts of the Government of Pakistan especially initiatives targeted reduce dependence on fossil fuel. He further emphasized the significance of academia in creating awareness not just among the youth, but also the faculty to ensure people are mindful of their practices and incorporate sustainability in their day to day lives. Finally, he added the prominent contribution of academia in providing technical solutions all of which feed into the grand scheme that is accelerating climate action.

The last address was from the youth where they called for better access to modern and climate smart public resources as it is critical for sustainable cities including: quality education, transport, waste collection facilities and safe air quality among others. Due to rapid urbanization, the youth would like to see more adaptive solutions to tackle its side effects. Additionally, to be able to make cities sustainable we need renovation of public spaces such as public squares, streets, parks, and urban spaces that are a vital part of urban cities. Urban renewable keeping green solutions in mind will help resolve many of the climate change challenges faced in Pakistan. Lastly, the youth made comparisons to cities around the world that are creating milestones in terms of tackling and avoiding the exacerbation of climate change – demanding the same can be achieved in Pakistan if we pledge take concrete action at institutional and individual level starting now.

Subsequently, participants engaged in productive deliberations on how to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Virtual attendees from provincial governments explained the work being done in different provinces and their contributions towards climate action.

To conclude, Ms. Almas Shakoor highlighted the complex nature of the issues surrounding climate change that cannot be tackled overnight. However, the need of the hour is to formulate strategies urgently and engage individuals from all levels, especially the youth
