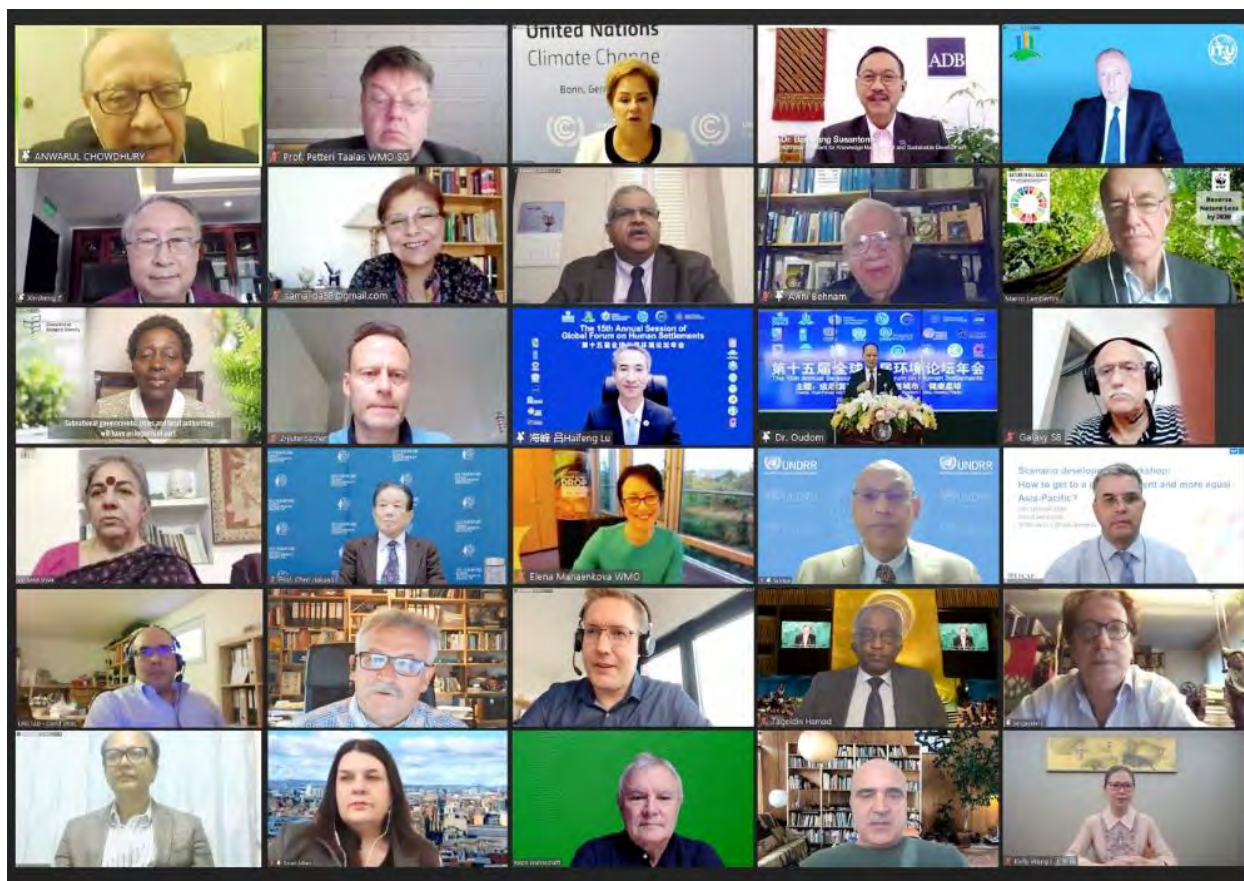


UPF Co-Sponsors Asia's 15th Global Forum on Human Settlements

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Asia -- The Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS), in partnership with UPF and more than 20 other organizations, virtually convened its 15th annual session from October 15 to 16, 2020. The two-day event, whose theme was "Post-Pandemic Recovery and Transformation: Resilient Cities, Healthy Planet," was held in observance of Urban October and reached more than 100,000 people worldwide.

Dr. Taj Hamad, vice president of UPF, was among some 100 distinguished speakers and commentators who contributed to in-depth discussions on a range of issues, from the current public health crisis to the impact climate change has had on cities. Other speakers included Prof. Petteri Taalas, secretary general of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO); Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the parent treaty of the 2015 Paris Agreement; and Malcolm Johnson, deputy secretary general of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The GFHS, which has held an annual session since 2005, is an NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN.



What follows is an extended summary of the event:

The 15th Annual Session of the Global Forum on Human Settlements was successfully convened in a virtual format from October 15 to 16, 2020, under the theme, "Post-Pandemic Recovery and Transformation: Resilient Cities, Healthy Planet," in observance of Urban October. A record number of organizations -- 24, including UPF, 10 UN agencies and the Asian Development Bank -- supported this year's event.

Some 100 distinguished speakers and commentators contributed to in-depth discussions on a range of challenges, such as the current public health crisis and the effects of ecological disruption and climate

change that cities have had to wrestle with to embark on a path to sustainable development. While the forum provided timely scientific solutions and policy recommendations, it also called on the global community to accelerate a green transformation in the post-pandemic recovery.



Speakers included:

Anwarul K. Chowdhury, chairman of the GFHS and former UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative;

Petteri Taalas, secretary general of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO);

Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC);

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, executive secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity;

Malcolm Johnson, deputy secretary general of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU);

Bambang Susantono, vice president of the Asian Development Bank;

Xinsheng Zhang, president of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN);

Satya Tripathi, UN assistant secretary-general and head of the New York Office, UN Environment Programme (UNEP);

Shamshad Akhtar, former UN under-secretary-general and executive secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP);

Marco Lambertini, director general of the WWF International;

Awni Behnam, former UN assistant secretary general and honorary president of the International Ocean Institute; and

Taj Hamad, vice president of UPF and chairman of the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (WANGO).

Many other senior officials of international organizations, government officials, well-known experts and scholars, entrepreneurs and heads of nonprofits presented. The two-day forum reached more than 100,000 people worldwide.

Opening Remarks

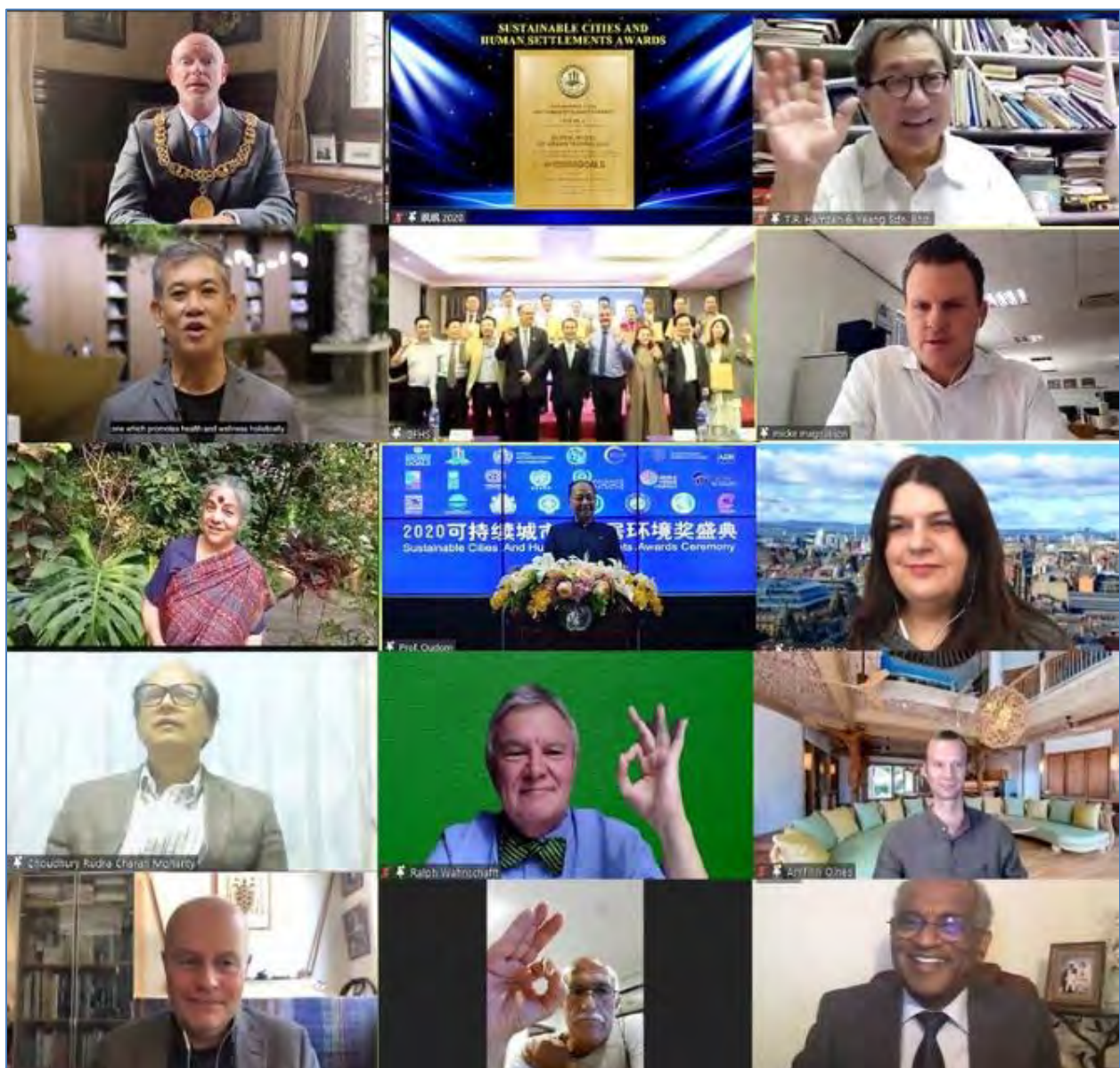
Prof. Petteri Taalas pointed out that 4.5 billion people were affected by disasters between 1998 and 2017 and that 96 percent of disasters are weather-related. In addition, water stress is a global challenge that needs to be tackled urgently and systematically. He also highlighted that the deterioration of air quality has been exacerbated by stagnant heat waves. Notwithstanding these challenges, there are win-win opportunities in climate mitigation, particularly through stepping up efforts to promote electric transportation, eco-mobility and renewable energy.

Patricia Espinosa reaffirmed the important role of inclusive multilateralism with helping cities and communities around the world make the energy transformation that is so urgently needed. She also stressed that "we must ensure that 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. Boosting ambition, building a more resilient future and providing a just transition from fossil fuels to green 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."

Elizabeth Mrema said that the convening of this forum is timely, as we gain increasing clarity on the connection between the resilience of human societies to pandemics, such as COVID-19, and on the way we address the interlinked challenges of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. We need to engage the sectors that can contribute the most to applying nature-based solutions to health and urban resilience. We also need innovative governance reform related to urban settlements, especially for spatial planning. She added that we need to accelerate a green circular economy, promoting jobs and business using innovation in cities with improved design, consumption and procurement standards, and opportunities for urban youth to be involved in start-ups that facilitate sustainability.

Malcolm Johnson said that almost half of the world's population, about 3.6 billion people, remains offline. Getting access to affordable Internet remains a prominent challenge for many. Digital technologies and ICTs are key enablers for accelerating sustainability efforts and climate actions in cities, from enhancing the operational efficiency of urban complexities and infrastructure to improving accessibility to essential services and bringing the benefits of nature to all people.

Dr. Bambang Susantono pointed out that in order to address the impact of COVID-19 on cities, immediate actions should enable creating better social protections for the most vulnerable groups and improve the provision of urban services and infrastructure. Strategic actions involve revisiting urban planning systems and devising and implementing strategies that strengthen the financial sustainability of cities and increase the governance capacity of various stakeholders.



Keynote Speakers

Zhang Xinsheng stressed that the evidence is crystal clear that our planet is in trouble, and therefore, we are in trouble too. We must promote a green post-pandemic recovery with nature and people at its heart. Investment in the health of our planet is investment in our own future. In order to address pressing urban

challenges, we must adopt nature-based solutions, he also said.

Satya Tripathi emphasized that we need nature more than ever and to work with nature to optimize our health and prevent future pandemics. We must urgently scale up and accelerate collaboration on conserving, restoring and fairly and sustainably using biodiversity. We need to recalibrate our relationship with the animal world to slow the rising tide of zoonotic diseases, like COVID-19. And if we shift investments and subsidies from fossil fuels to renewables, we can slow climate change, reduce air pollution, create environmentally sustainable jobs and power communities across the world.

High-level Dialogue

Dr. Vandana Shiva shared that the wellbeing of people is dependent on the wellbeing of the Earth. Food is the connector which links humans to other species and urban settlements to the countryside. Sustainable food systems can address the multiple crises of the climate emergency; the health emergency; and the livelihood, poverty and hunger emergency.

In his closing remarks, GFHS Secretary General Lu Haifeng underlined the need to kick-start a green development revolution, green city revolution and green cultural revolution on a global scale. Against the backdrop of COVID-19, the international community must make concerted efforts in accelerating the implementation of global conventions and agendas, particularly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets out the 15-year plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and reducing and containing ecological and climate disasters. Lu also proposed the formulation of a post-2030 Green Revolution, Healthy Planet Agenda and taking decisive actions to realize a green transformation and secure a promising future.

COVID-19 is continuing to cause human suffering, social upheaval and economic turmoil across the globe and can be considered a once-in-a-century ecological security and public health crisis. UN Secretary General António Guterres emphasized in the latest UN Policy Brief "COVID-19 in an Urban World" that "now is the time to rethink and reshape the urban world. Now is the moment to adapt to the reality of this and future pandemics. Now is our chance to recover better, by building more resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities."

The forum is timely in heeding the call of the UN Secretary-General. It addressed important topics on urgent urban issues, including preserving and sustainably managing biodiversity and guaranteeing ecological security; integrated climate, hydrology and environment services for sustainable cities; building urban resilience to climate change; financing for resilient urban infrastructure; smart, sustainable cities and communities; the International Green Model City Initiative; adaptable buildings and resilient cities; post-crisis healthy and anti-fragile cities; the blue economy and healthy ocean; blockchain technology and smart urban governance; energy-efficient and sustainable housing; and a resilient, inclusive, gender-equal and green post-pandemic economic recovery.

The forum also yielded fruitful outcomes and made a significant contribution to the process of restoring people's wellbeing; promoting a green recovery and changes in businesses, cities and even countries; and preserving and sustainably managing biodiversity -- thereby making cities and human settlements safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable, and achieving our vision of a healthy planet.

Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements Awards Ceremony 2020

The 15th GFHS concluded with the Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements Awards Ceremony 2020 (SCAHS 2020), which recognized 19 organizations and individuals from around the globe for their excellence in sustainable development practices and innovations.

The awardees included the city of Glasgow, Scotland, the host of next UN Climate Change Conference; Dr. Vandana Shiva, an eminent scientist, writer and environmental philosopher from India; Dr. Ken Yeang, a well-known architect, ecologist, planner and author from Malaysia; Soneva Fushi, a carbon neutral tourism resort in the Maldives in South Asia; DyeCoo, the inventor of a zero-water and zero-chemical dyeing technology; TerraCycle, an innovative recycling enterprise from the United States; Country Garden Forest City; The Commonland from the Netherlands; DP Architects from Singapore; and others. (A complete list of awardees can be viewed at www.gfhsforum.org/award).

At a moment when the fate of humankind is at stake, it is significant for these sustainability leaders to influence more stakeholders to jointly endeavor towards sustainable development.