

**United Nations High-Level Political Forum 2023
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Speech by Mathieu MORI, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

„Transformation from the ground up: Acting at local level”

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Chair, If you allow me I would like to start with a word on Ukraine.

Since 2014 the Congress of the Council of Europe has been accompanying the country in its decentralisation process.

Today, everyone in Ukraine will tell you that the country would have collapsed within weeks of the aggression had it not been for that decentralisation reform. It is because hundreds of mayors had the powers and the means to quickly react to the consequences of the war that Ukraine stands strong today.

It is for this reason that President Zelensky calls the mayors his Second army.

In the face of increasing and often life threatening challenges around the globe this is what local leaders are in many ways : a second army.

Today we need these strong local leaders to achieve the sustainable development goals.

The Secretary-General's SDG Progress report is very clear on that front and I quote--:”Local action is a precondition for delivering the promise of the SDGs”.

Since the majority of the SDG targets will only be reached with the involvement of cities and regions, we need national governments to empower local authorities.

When I look at our constituency, in Europe, I am optimistic. At the last Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government two months ago, 46 Presidents and Prime Ministers stressed loud and clear the crucial role local and regional authorities play in upholding democracy, the rule of law and in delivering SDGs.

For the first time, they stressed strongly the role cities and regions play in promoting and protecting Human Rights and in helping the European Court of Human Rights to implement its judgments.

We consider this development a historic milestone since we see the achievement of SDGs to be closely linked to the delivery on human rights. The rights to education, proper healthcare, clean environment are at the foundation of the 2030 Agenda, and they cannot be delivered without proper engagement from local and regional governments.

Dear colleagues,

Today we call on national governments across the globe to do more. Transformation must be led from the ground up. Let's give the mayors the powers and the means to do just that!