

Forum of Mayors (UNECE Urban Resilience Week)

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Speech of Mr Mathieu MORI, Secretary General of the Congress of
Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

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(1051 words / Approx 9 minutes)

Thank you chairs

Dear Deputy Executive Director,

Dear Mayors,

Dear participants,

It is a pleasure to address you today on the fundamental topic of urban renewal, which is about creating a liveable future for young generations.

Last week, when I was preparing this intervention, I could hear and see these young generations demonstrating in front of the Council of Europe.

They were supporting Duarte Agostinho and his friends, a group of young people aged 11 to 24 who are taking 33 Member States of the Council of Europe to the European Court of Human Rights for, they claim, not doing enough in combatting climate change.

We will keep a close eye on the decision of the Court. Should it recognise the right to a healthy environment as a human right, it would be a change of paradigm, going far beyond our 46 Member States.

It is our collective duty, as mayors, as international organisations to give hope to these young people. Without hope human dignity is threatened.

For this reason, the Congress, adopted a recommendation to the United Nations' SDGs Summits calling for accelerated localisation of SDGs and

we welcome the Political Declaration on SDGs adopted last month at the Summit, as it commits to further localising SDGs and stresses the role of local and regional authorities in their implementation.

Giving local and regional authorities means for action is achieved through decentralisation and local democracy which, in Europe, are protected by the European Charter of Local Self-Government. It is our statutory role as a Congress, to ensure that this binding treaty ratified by all 46 member States of the Council of Europe is implemented.

Since we speak about responsibilities of local and regional authorities in protecting the environment, I want to inform you that the Congress has recently proposed to elaborate an Additional Protocol to this treaty to enshrine the rights of local authorities to participate in decision making on environmental matters and to give them the adequate financial means to deliver on fighting climate change. This new legal tool is welcomed by several countries and we are working at convincing all 46 countries to support it.

Of course, the role of local and regional authorities in our societies goes beyond implementing SDGs. Local and regional authorities also have a strong role to play in upholding human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. This role has been stressed by European leaders during a Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe last May.

For the first time, the 46 MS have stressed the crucial role local and regional authorities play not only in promoting democracy but also in protecting Human Rights.

The Summit stressed how local and regional authorities are important actors:

- in delivering Human Rights,
- how they can play a bigger role in helping implement judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and
- how they should work more in partnership with national Human Rights Institutions.

The task is ambitious but exciting. We will do our part at the Council of Europe and we support the initiatives to include local and regional authorities in discussions on human rights, here in the UN system.

Speaking of urban renewal, I should mention that the next Congress Session later this month will adopt the revised European Urban Charter, which sets out the core principles of modern urban governance:

- ensuring democratic security in the context of war, pandemic, and terrorist attacks;
- fighting against corruption;
- ensuring urban residents' participation in local politics and developing a culture of democratic citizen participation;
- ensuring social, economic, and cultural rights, and reducing social inequalities in critical services;
- ensuring that the right to a healthy environment is respected for all citizens;

- and, using digitalisation and artificial intelligence to deliver better local democracy, public services and improve people's wellbeing.

We believe that the revised Charter and the New Urban Agenda of UN-Habitat, are complementary and the Congress remains committed to strengthening its cooperation with UN-Habitat in this field.

Finally, as we just heard the Mayor of Kharkiv, Mr Terekhov, I wanted to stress the resilience of Ukraine local authorities, acting as a real second army since the war started. Through peer-to-peer support and technical expertise, the Congress is deploying relentless efforts for the consolidation of local democracy in the country.

The Congress will also contribute to the International Register of Damage for Ukraine, which was launched by the Council of Europe as a first step towards an international compensation mechanism for victims of the war.

We are convinced that Ukrainian local and regional authorities will have a major role to play in its effective operation and are working with the local and regional associations, the Register administration and the ministry of justice towards this aim.

Ladies and gentlemen, this was only a brief overview of our current action in support of urban resilience and urban renewal. We look forward to even stronger cooperation with you and the UN actors on these issues.

Thank you all for your attention. I wish you a fruitful day of exchanges.