PRESS RELEASE from UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat

Guaranteeing equity and access to all in the post-COVID era

#BeyondTheOutbreak

Despite the best efforts of many local leaders, our cities are generally **not designed with everybody in mind.** The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of ensuring equal access, since persons with disabilities, older persons, and many other populations have encountered added difficulties during the outbreak. The joint live learning experience, developed by **UCLG**, **Metropolis**, **World Enabled, BMZ**, **GIZ** and **UN-Habitat** is part of a broader partnership within the Cities4All initiative and the policy recommendations from the Townhall on Inclusive and Accessible Cities highlighted how the recovery needs to take to take on board the values of equity and accessibility to open new opportunities for equal access, solidarity and resilience in cities

During the session on 20 May 2020 participants addressed the measures taken to ensure equal access in the midst of the outbreak, as well as actionable steps that need to be taken to ensure a joint way forward. The session included the shared expertise of mayors, city officials and partners such as **UNICEF** and the **World Bank.**

The session was introduced by **Maimunah Mohd Sharif,** Executive Director of UN-Habitat, who urged city managers to partner with organizations of persons with disabilities and older persons, to ensure an enabling environment for fulfilling the needs of all and to be mindful of the needs of women and girls with disabilities to ensure that the principles of universal design are respected.

"The impacts of the crisis will be uneven, particularly in those environments in which inequalities already exist. It is essential to have disaggregated data, to include information on barriers and allow city leaders to improve accessibility," *she said.*

Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of UCLG, who facilitated the dialogue among local governments, emphasized the need to make some of the temporary measures into permanent ones beyond the outbreak. She called on local governments to take responsibility and understand that the quality of life of the most vulnerable is what also defines the quality of our societies and our joint security.

 "Our partnership within the Cities for All Global Compact is critical to ensure a true drive for accessibility in the local and regional governments agenda."

The UN Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility, **María Soledad Cisternas,** called on the leadership of local and regional governments to consider full participation of citizens and to create full inclusion in the preparation of public policies, legislation, and plans in order to face the pandemic, and to incorporate lessons from the session in programmes in the future.

"Accessibility is now", she stated, *"and it is essential to use these spaces for dialogues among local governments and other stakeholders to interact, and to make accessibility a reality for the fulfillment of human rights."*

Victor Pineda, President of World Enabled and co-founder of the Cities4All Initiative, was the co-convenor of the learning experience, and introduced the second part of the session called "Radical Inclusion and the Cities for All Global Platform", with partners from the World Bank and the United Nations. He commended the involvement of the signatory cities of the Compact and laid out the roadmap of the Cities4All initiative and the Global Compact for the coming year.

"We need to have a continued advocacy, sharing experiences through continued dialogue. It is critical to overcome data deserts and lack of actionable responses to bring about the change that we need," he said.

The first roundtable, centering on the experiences of local governments was addressed by Ibnu Sina, Mayor of Banjarmasin, who showcased the special multi-stakeholder taskforce developed by the city, which had considered vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities, older persons and the urban poor, and prepared social safety nets to distribute assistance and food to those who need it the most. **Cid Torquato,** Commissioner, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Sao Paulo, highlighted that the crisis of the COVID-19 outbreak also presented a window of opportunity to adopt the digital transformation, and how teleworking could provide an opportunity for many people with disabilities and diminish prejudices.

Dr. **Bushra Al Mulla**, Executive Director Department of Community Development, Abu Dhabi laid out the actions taken by the city and how Abu Dhabi had endeavoured to protect its most vulnerable in the workforce by providing work-from-home options to pregnant women and persons with disabilities even before the lockdown, as well as providing homeschooling options.

Imen Ouardani, Vice Mayor of Sousse, addressed the impact of the pandemic on migrants and, in particular, migrants who were in precarious situations due to the pandemic, and laid out the work being done in the city to ensure the economic reintegration of migrants and to improve access to public service, digitalization, and information for all.

Victor Calise, Commissioner, Mayor's Office of People with Disabilities of New York City, described efforts made by the city to reach out to persons with

disabilities, through disability service facilitators and a disability specific website to help provide resources for people who need assistance. The issue of education was also deemed critical to ensure equal access which is why, he stated, the department of education worked to ensure the materials were available on accessible digital formats.

The city of Montevideo, represented by **Fabiana Larisa Goyenche**, Director of Social Development, underwent a drastic change in thinking around disabilities, focusing on the issue of accessibility and the responsibility of the local government to eliminate barriers for persons with disabilities and address the social emergency that arises from the pandemic. **Johanna Seppala**, Head of Participation and Information Unit in the City Executive Office, Helsinki, explained how the local government had developed the **Helsinki Aid** initiative, to provide aid to older persons and the people most in need.

Charlotte McClain Nhlapo, Global Disability Advisor of the World Bank shared the work of the World Bank's disability unit, focusing on two key commitments: ensuring disability-inclusive public facilities, and access to disability disaggregated data. She called on participants to answer the survey provided by UCLG and World Enabled, to gather data on accessibility in times of COVID-19.

Kristine Lange, Programne Specialist, Disability Inclusive Humanitarian Action, UNICEF, explained how the crisis had forced the agency to rethink service delivery. The pandemic has affected children with disabilities, and in particular those living in institutions. The work of UNICEF has been geared to ensuring children have access to education and information in the midst of the pandemic, and how it is critical to work to adapt curriculums. She commended the level of commitment to accessibility in the pandemic, and stated that it is necessary to ensure this commitment in the aftermath.

The wrap-up was presented by **Octavi De la Varga,** Secretary General of Metropolis, who argued that the session had hammered home the necessity of ensuring access. The COVID-19 pandemic, he argued, had further showcased how persons with disabilities are a heterogenous group of people with diverse needs, and that the outbreak provides us with an opportunity to rethink how we are developing policies and to bring about a true transformation in how we access public services and how we deliver basic services.

Cities were called to upload their experiences in the platform www.citiesforglobalhealth.org where over 400 cases can be found.

The live learning exercises will continue next week, with a session on **local democracy.**

About the Live Learning Experience Series:

The Live Learning Series hosted by UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, has brought together more than 2,000 participants over the course of ten sessions in which participants from local and regional governments, the UN system, and partners from civil society shared their experiences, initiatives,

and actions to support their communities facing the pandemic through the provision of key basic services.

The series started late March and cities across the globe have shared their experiences, initiatives and actions in response to the pandemic. They also shared their frontline views on how cities may transform beyond the outbreak.

About United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

UCLG is the global organization of local and regional governments and their associations that represents and defends their interests on the world stage. Representing 70 per cent of the world's population, UCLG members are present in all world regions: Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Eurasia, Middle East-West Asia, Latin America and North America - organised in seven continental sections, a metropolitan section and a regional forum. This network covers more than 240,000 cities, regions and metropolises and more than 175 local and regional government associations present in 140 countries. UCLG includes among its main areas of political interest local democracy, climate change and environmental protection, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, the role of culture in sustainability, local finance, urban development and city diplomacy for peacebuilding. Visit www.uclg.org and follow @uclg_org for more.

About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat is the UN agency focused on our cities, towns and communities. UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries supporting people in cities and human settlements for a better urban future. Working with governments and local partners, its high impact projects combine world-class expertise and local knowledge to deliver timely and targeted solutions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a dedicated Goal on cities, SDG 11 – to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.   Visit www.unhabitat.org and follow @unhabitat for further information.

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