

**Official Event
Opening Ceremony**

Opening Remarks

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[UN Deputy High Commissioner]

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

The focus of this year's World Human Rights Cities Forum on Poverty and Inequalities" is timely and critical.

Eight years ago, the global community agreed to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Today, progress on more than 30 per cent of all their targets has either stalled or reversed.¹ The SDG Summit held mid-September concluded with a political Declaration that leaves world leaders with a to-do list that should turn words into action to set us back on track.

Extreme poverty is on the rise for the first time in a generation. If current trends continue, nearly 600 million people will live in extreme poverty by 2030,² including the 132 million people pushed into this plight due to climate change.³

The global economic crisis has sent food and energy prices soaring, plunging millions more into poverty. Hunger levels are now at their highest since 2005.⁴

Inequalities have reached unsustainable levels. In 2021, the poorest half of the global population owned only two percent of the total wealth, while the richest 10 percent owned a staggering 76 percent.⁵

Inequalities are widening also within cities, with poverty rates declining more slowly in cities than in rural areas.⁶ Rapid urbanization often results in more slums, informal settlements, inadequate living conditions, and insecure housing and land tenure.

¹ A/78/80

² <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>

³ World Bank Group, World Bank Annual Report 2022, p. 11.

⁴ See <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>.

⁵ Lucas Chancel and others, World Inequality Report 2022 (World Inequality Lab, 2021), p. 10.

⁶ Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, p. 16: [FINAL GSDR 2023-Digital -110923_1.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

Dear participants,

With 70 percent of the global population projected to live in cities by 2050,⁷ cities have an immense responsibility in tackling poverty and inequality towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Local governments stand at the forefront of the transitions needed to address, indeed redress the systemic weaknesses of our economic, social and environmental systems as laid bare and accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the subsequent food, inflation and cost of living crises.

To achieve transformative change, human rights must be at the core of all policies, budgets, and decisions, including those related to economic and fiscal matters at the local level.

Local governments can drive economies anchored in human rights by grounding economic policies, plans, and programmes in human rights obligations and principles and ensuring budgets reflect provisions for substantial investments in economic, social, and cultural rights. To that end, I would like to stress the importance of collecting and analyzing disaggregated data that would help policy makers, with the participation of affected people, design policies and institutional practices that uphold human rights.

In Niš, Serbia, the Mayor, with the support of our Office, took a significant step towards promoting inclusion of the Roma community living in an informal settlement in critical decision-making processes to address the housing needs of 550 Roma residents. Following these consultations, the city decided this year to allocate them land for social housing. Plans are underway to construct apartments that will provide secure housing for all residents, eliminating the threat of potential evictions.

In the counties of Marsabit, Makueni and Nakuru, in Kenya, our Office, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator, is training

⁷ UN Habitat, World Cities Report 2022, p. xv.

communities about a human rights-based approach to budgeting and equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in county-level budgeting processes that determine allocations for basic social services to promote the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable and those at risk of being left behind.

These examples illustrate the important role cities play in realising the SDGs anchoring solutions in human rights.

Under the leadership of the High Commissioner, our Office is advocating for a human rights economy as an essential pathway to rescue the 2030 Agenda, to build economies that centre people and the planet in all economic, social, and environmental policies, plans and programs.

Local governments, as democratic institutions, policy makers, service providers, employers, and contractors, have a crucial role to play in achieving the systemic changes necessary to reshape our economies, to reverse the chronic under-investment in economic, social, and other rights, combat inequalities and protect the health of our planet.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a milestone document that should inspire a renewed commitment to uphold and advance human rights in every sphere of human endeavor. I encourage you all – national and local authorities, regional governments, civil society actors and others - to pledge concrete actions that can bring about transformative change for the greater enjoyment of human rights for all.

I wish you a successful event and constructive discussions.