



Letter from the U20 Chair to the Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit

Call to urgent action to assist cities in their efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic

More than 4.2 billion individuals live in densely populated urban areas around the world and are exposed to the highly contagious COVID-19 virus. Combatting the pandemic in cities is critical to reducing overall exposure to the virus and its global impact. Preventing and managing COVID-19 outbreaks will be especially challenging in cities with informal settlements as people living in slums often depend on informal health facilities and suffer from the absence of vital public services. Local and regional governments, as first responders to this crisis, play an essential role in guaranteeing local public service provision and human rights protection to their inhabitants. Cities also play a central economic role, serving as hubs of business, research and innovation. As G20 leaders discuss coordinated responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the perspectives and needs of cities must be taken into account.

The cities participating in the Urban 20 (U20), which Riyadh has the honor of chairing in 2020, are now on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19. As U20 Chair, I commend G20 leaders for recognizing the urgency of the global COVID-19 situation and urge them to consider strengthening capacities to improve resilience, preparedness and responsiveness in large urban centers.

The U20, convened by UCLG and C40 Cities, aims to facilitate a lasting engagement between the G20 and cities to raise the profile of urban issues in the G20 agenda. In light of the current pandemic, the priority of the cities participating in the U20 is to focus on handling this crisis for the health and wellbeing of their inhabitants first and foremost. The U20 remains committed in the long term to championing ambitious action to address the global climate emergency, environmental degradation, social inequality and poverty.

To ensure that cities can continue to strengthen public health systems, maintain essential services, manage economic fallout, and protect the health and well-being of their inhabitants - including the most vulnerable - I call on the G20 to:

- **Strengthen the first line of defense by committing to financing public health systems and easing import/export/donation regulations.** Immediate measures must include the deployment of qualified personnel and equipment, diagnostic tests, treatment and personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare personnel in high-population density, urban environments.



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- **Ensure that cities have direct access to critical financial resources to address the public health and economic crisis by deploying rescue packages.** Cities typically do not have access to the same international lending or funding sources that nations do, making it crucial that G20 leaders anticipate and address these needs in their responses, including through cooperation between national and local governments, and with the inclusions of the private and philanthropic sector.
- **Recognize and support the essential role of local public servants that are on the frontline** working tirelessly to ensure this health crisis does not also become a social crisis hitting the most vulnerable as well as guaranteeing the functioning of local public service provision.
- **Address the impact of the digital divide**, including access to information and the internet for all citizens, the protection of citizens' digital rights and the ensuring of continued education during school closures and productivity via teleworking to avoid instability and loss of significant educational or economic ground.
- **Provide fiscal assistance to cities to guarantee provision of vital local public services** (including public safety, sanitation, water, sewer, solid waste, safe public transport and energy) which are essential to maintaining stability as well as adequate sanitary conditions in congested areas. Additionally, ensure continued delivery of these services during isolation periods.
- **Expand and fortify diagnostic, treatment and monitoring capacity for COVID-19 globally.** Poverty and inadequate response capacity of health systems, especially in informal settlements, exacerbate health emergencies. Pandemics know no borders, meaning inadequate ability to respond as a health system will impact everyone, not just a single neighborhood, city, nation, or region.
- **Develop and review current national and local COVID-19 response plans** to ensure the provision of health services, and the protection of human rights, to refugees and migrants.
- **Ensure supply chain continuity and security**, including to guarantee essentials such as food, water, adequate housing, and power, at a scale that can meet urban needs for a prolonged period of time.
- **Develop rapid re-employment and social safety net strategies** to stimulate economic recovery following COVID-19 and contribute towards fighting inequality and social division, including via investment in employment efforts, and income generation for informal workers.
- **Ensure the post COVID-19 reconstruction phase**, including any form of stimulus or investment package, promotes a fair, just and sustainable future for all people. Adequate financing for cities and regions must acknowledge and empower them to fight inequality, poverty and the global climate crisis through building greener, healthier and more resilient societies - in the spirit of a Global Green New Deal.

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I urge G20 leaders to ensure that the measures agreed at its Extraordinary Virtual Leaders' Summit support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's pledge to leave no one behind, reduce inequalities (SDG10) and support sustainable cities and communities (SDG11). In line with the recommendations of UN Habitat, we reinforce that special attention must be paid to the needs of vulnerable populations such as older persons, women, children, people with disabilities, refugees, migrants, and the homeless. Those living in informal settlements or slums within and around cities require particular attention as essential recommendations to curb COVID-19 such as hand washing, and social distancing are very difficult to implement in densely populated areas with limited waste management, an absence of basic services, and poor housing.

As the premier forum for international economic cooperation, the G20 can contribute to overcoming global health challenges. To best deal with this pandemic, knowledge sharing, an open dialogue and collaboration between G20 leaders, cities and the communities at the frontline of this crisis is critical to ensure the coordination of international, national and city-level measures to respond to COVID-19 - so that we may, together, protect the health, livelihood, and well-being of our populations.

All the best,

Fahd Al-Rasheed

U20 Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Fahd Al-Rasheed', written over a light blue horizontal line.

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