



**Statement by Astrid Schomaker
Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity**

**World Habitat Day (7 October 2024)
Engaging Youth to Create a Better Urban Future**

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If fully implemented, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) will set the world on a path to living in harmony with nature. Getting there entails bold transformational change. The scale of the challenge is captured eloquently in the theme that Colombia, the host country of the forthcoming COP 16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), crafted for the conference: “peace with nature”.

Achieving peace with nature cannot happen without action by cities and in cities. UN Habitat reckons that, by mid-century, 70 per cent of the world’s population will be city dwellers. The countries where most of the planet’s biodiversity is located are projected to see the highest rates of mainly urban population growth. From spatial planning to agriculture, industry and tourism, decoupling socio-economic progress from the destruction of nature requires shifting to sustainable consumption and production in urban settings.

As the threat of more urban encroachment on nature looms, extreme weather events are battering cities around the world, causing death and suffering, destroying homes, wrecking essential infrastructure and devastating wobbly economies. The impacts of climate-induced shocks are compounded by the other prongs of the poly-crisis gripping our planet: biodiversity loss, land degradation and pollution and waste. According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), urban expansion is one of the main direct drivers of degradation in terrestrial, inland water, and coastal ecosystems.

Cities and urban areas need not be enemies of nature. They can support biodiversity, human health and wellbeing as part of the bold transformational change that the delivery of the KMGBF requires. Subnational governments, cities and other local authorities can accelerate efforts to transform our cities into hubs of wellbeing and sustainability.

Target 12 of the KMGBF – “Green spaces and urban planning for human wellbeing and biodiversity”—offers pathways to achieve that. Those pathways include mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, ensuring biodiversity-inclusive urban planning, enhancing native biodiversity, ecological connectivity and integrity, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable urbanization.

As is the case with the other targets of the KMGBF, achieving Target 12 entails a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that includes the meaningful participation of young people. We need their energy and innovation, but first we must make space for youth to help us find the solutions we need.

Believing in the potential of youth is not enough; we must provide young people with the means to contribute adequately. Disparities in access to education and technology persist, particularly in low-income countries and among young women. This is why the achievement of the SDGs—reinvigorated by the recent adoption of the Pact for the Future—is a crucial endeavor for our common future.

On this day and every day, let us engage and be engaged with youth to create a better urban future.

