

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS TO THE SECOND GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT
CONFERENCE**

Beijing/Online, 14 October 2021, 8:00 am

Your Excellency President Xi Jinping,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference.

I express my profound gratitude to President Xi and the Government of the People's Republic of China for their generosity in hosting this Conference.

We are meeting in Beijing – and globally - five years after the first Global Sustainable Transport Conference was held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

Since that time, and especially over the last eighteen months, the critical role of transport in growth, sustainable development and securing the health of our planet has only become clearer.

When economies were brought to a standstill at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the most dramatic impacts were felt in the transport sector – starting with job losses.

Global road transport activity went down by half. Air traffic demand in 2020 was just one third of the previous year.

While this translated into fewer traffic accidents, improved air quality and a rapid drop in greenhouse gas emissions, those temporary gains have not been sustained.

Massive declines in the use of public transit – a lifeline that enables essential workers and those living in poverty to earn a living – threatened its financial viability.

Some essential transport workers in cities, and seafarers trapped on ships, were forced to work in unsafe and inhumane conditions.

Communities, economic sectors and even entire countries that depend on tourism faced enormous losses in revenue. In some Small Island Developing States, tourism represents as much as 80 percent of exports – which disappeared overnight.

And as a deeply uneven recovery gets underway, we are seeing further disruption to global supply chains. The interconnected nature of transport, global consumption, trade and the economy is clear; but our response lacks the solidarity needed for an inclusive global recovery.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that transport is far more than a means of getting people and goods from A to B.

It is fundamental to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement – which were badly off-track even before the pandemic hit.

COVID-19 has pushed an estimated 120 million people into extreme poverty, 160 million into hunger, and set back education for around 100 million children.

We are further from realizing the Sustainable Development Goals on climate, ocean, and biodiversity than we were when they were agreed six years ago.

We are already close to the 1.5 degrees Celsius upper limit agreed in Paris. The door is closing for action on climate, nature and pollution.

We must act together, smartly, and quickly, to make the next nine years count.

Transport, which accounts for more than one quarter of global greenhouse gases, is key to getting on track.

We must decarbonize all means of transport, in order to get to net-zero emissions by 2050.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We know how to make this happen.

First, we must accelerate the decarbonization of the entire transport sector.

Let's be honest. While member states have made some initial steps through the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organization to address emissions from shipping and aviation, current commitments are not aligned with the 1.5-degree goal of the Paris Agreement.

In fact, they are more consistent with warming way above 3 degrees.

Adopting a new set of more ambitious and credible targets that are truly consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement must be an urgent priority for both these bodies in the months and years ahead.

The priorities are clear:

- Phase out the production of internal combustion engine vehicles by 2035 for leading manufacturing countries, and by 2040 for developing countries.
- Zero emission ships must be the default choice, and commercially available for all by 2030, in order to achieve zero emissions in the shipping sector by 2050.
- Companies must start using sustainable aviation fuels now, in order to cut carbon emissions per passenger by 65 per cent by 2050.

All stakeholders have a role to play, from individuals changing their travel habits, to businesses transforming their carbon footprint. Governments must incentivize clean transport options, including through standards and taxation, and impose stricter regulation of infrastructure and procurement.

In developed countries, transport policies that encourage cycling and walking in urban areas, rather than driving short distances, can contribute to progress across the SDGs: on climate, health, pollution and more.

Sustainable railway systems should be upgraded and expanded for medium and long-distance travel for people and goods, to increase efficiency and encourage shifts in behaviour.

Second, we must close access and safety gaps.

This means helping more than one billion people to access paved roads, with designated space for pedestrians and bicycles, and providing convenient public transit options.

It means providing safe conditions for all on public transport by ending harassment and violence against women and girls, and reducing deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Third, we must build resilience into transport systems.

Investments in the recovery from COVID-19 must target sustainable transport, generating decent jobs and opportunities for isolated communities. Public transport should be the foundation for urban mobility. Per dollar invested, it creates three times more jobs than building new highways.

Decarbonization must go hand in hand with a just and inclusive transition that reduces inequalities and supports the poorest communities.

Much existing infrastructure, from ports to public transit, is vulnerable to extreme climate events which are happening with greater frequency and severity.

We need better risk analysis and disaster planning, even as we scale up solutions.

Increased finance for climate adaptation is essential for investment in sustainable, resilient transport systems. The recent IPCC report underscored that the target of \$100 billion in climate financing from the developed to the developing world is an under-estimate – but even this is far from being reached.

I reiterate my call for half of all climate finance to be allocated to adaptation.

We must funnel both public and private resources towards sustainable infrastructure in developing countries, to drive a recovery from the pandemic that accelerates progress across the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fourth, and finally, we must work together more coherently.

We need effective partnerships, including with the private sector, that help to share knowledge, bridge silos, and direct finance and technological capacity towards our common goals.

The transformative potential of sustainable transport can only be unleashed if improvements translate into poverty eradication, decent jobs better health and education, and increased opportunities for women and girls.

Countries have much to learn from each other.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The next nine years must see a global shift towards renewable energy. Sustainable transport is central to that transformation.

There is still a long way to go, but I am encouraged by some of the commitments made by governments, local authorities and the private sector, in the context of this Conference and in the lead-up to COP26.

I look forward to seeing them implemented.

This Conference is an important opportunity to galvanize action by all, to build the sustainable transport systems we need for a green, inclusive and equitable future.

Let's get to work.

Thank you.