

**Remarks at the UN Symposium on Public  
Institutions and Digital Government Transformation:  
“COVID-19 and SDG Implementation”**

*24 November 2020, Incheon, Korea*

Thank you, Mr. SHIM Bokyun, Head of UN Project Office on Governance, for your warm introduction.

H.E. Mr. CHIN Young, Minister of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea,

H.E. LIU Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,

Mr. PARK Namchoon, Mayor of Incheon Metropolitan City,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor to speak to you as part of today’s opening session of this UN Symposium on “Effective, Inclusive and Accountable Public Institutions and Digital Government Transformation for Resilient Recovery and the Implementation of the SDGs.”

And it is my privilege to deliver these remarks at such an important time, as we strive to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals before their 2030 target date.

My sincere appreciation goes to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs for extending an invitation for me to participate today. My gratitude also goes to the Korean Ministry of the Interior and Safety as well as Incheon Metropolitan City for their generous support of this timely Symposium.

Indeed, today we face a variety of converging crises and elevated global uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to upend our economies, societies, and way of life. At the same time, the climate crisis is deepening as temperatures surge, sea levels rise, and wildfires burn.

In this regard, there has never been a more important

time to build capacities to mobilize, organize, and equip public institutions to build back better and achieve the UN SDGs.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we collectively strive to build our societies back from the ongoing pandemic, I firmly believe that the Sustainable Development Goals can help bring us together during this period of elevated uncertainty and simultaneously synergize our COVID-19 socio-economic recoveries.

The SDGs offer a viable blueprint to rebuild our societies in a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient manner from the pandemic.

Five years since their adoption, the SDGs have made tangible progress on bettering maternal mortality rates, ending poverty and hunger, and improving the quality

of water and sanitation in many communities.

But progress is uneven on others and COVID-19, conflict, and climate change around the world, including in the Asia-Pacific region, are hindering and reversing SDG implementation.

Against this backdrop, we need to move forward with a renewed sense of urgency and reinvigorated political will with only 10 years left to go.

In this regard, it is critical to strength the capacities of governments, at all levels, to catalyze whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches in order to achieve the SDGs.

While multi-stakeholder partnerships are also important in our quest to achieve the SDGs, the primary responsibility should fall on government institutions to spur enhanced action and engagement from the rest of

society.

This is why it is necessary to build on the Committee of Experts on Public Administration's 11 Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development. Indeed, we need all public institutions—legislative, executive, judicial, security, and others—incorporating these principles to help our chances of achieving the SDGs.

At the same time, both national ownership and advancing digital transformation are essential to harness the full effectiveness of public institutions with a view towards SDG implementation as well as recovering from the pandemic.

First, national ownership is a prerequisite to achieve the SDGs.

In this regard, we must scale-up the capacities of

governments in Asia and all around the world so that they can mainstream the SDGs into key planning and policies.

I believe this should be done at all levels, including the local and municipal levels.

This will give us the best chance of success and help instill a strong sense of ownership, collaboration, and solidarity; both within and beyond national borders and cities.

Second, we must do more to accelerate digital transformation to address both current and future shocks and fortify greater resilience in the Asia and Pacific region and beyond. These include not only COVID-19 and climate change, but also future pandemics, conflicts, and economic crises.

Over the next 10 years, progress in digital

transformation, technology, and innovation will be essential in delivering on all the SDGs—from poverty eradication and food security, to energy, water, and sanitation—and more.

But, in order to catalyze this digital transformation, we must also be mindful of the importance of bridging the digital divide.

To do so, upper income countries must elevate their efforts to share best practice, build capacities, and help other governments—at all levels—acquire, utilize, and deliver the tools necessary to usher in this new era of sustainability.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

COVID-19 and other global crises such as climate change have underlined our fundamental interconnectedness.

They have also made it clear that we need global solutions rooted in inclusivity and sustainability, and centered on enhancing the health and resilience of all people, communities, and our planet, in order to create the future we want.

Over the next three days at this Symposium, you all have an invaluable opportunity to help shape innovative best practices for public institutions to meet the transformational aspirations of the SDGs and deliver this future for all. This is one where no one is left behind.

As such, let's raise our urgency and make further efforts to help public institutions realize this transformative vision for all people and our planet. I thank you for your attention. /END/