

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE FOR EVENT “NATURE WITHIN CITIES AND CITIES WITHIN NATURE”  
30 June 2021**

Cities are on the front lines of environmental degradation and climate disruption. Recent heatwaves in Europe and elsewhere have highlighted the crucial role trees and nature play in cooling our cities and purifying our air.

Tree coverage and city forests can dramatically reduce the urban heat island effect, particularly in the poorest neighbourhoods. Yet, equitable access to safe green space remains widely lacking. Urban tree-planting and restoration efforts are urgently needed in traditionally disinvested neighbourhoods and communities that need cooling, shade and green space. Cost-effective nature-based solutions, such as protecting and restoring forests within and near to cities can also help to scale up climate action and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.

Every dollar spent on ecosystem conservation can yield up to seven times that amount in the larger economy. The European Green Deal, with 1.8 trillion euros of planned investments including biodiversity and climate components, can foster a green recovery from the Covid-19 emergency. And its Just Transition Mechanism can ensure no one is left behind. However, urban planning currently overlooks ecosystems and nature found in and around cities. We need more national and sub-national policies on sustainable urban development to ensure that nature can deliver solutions for erosion, flooding and heat-related risks.

Without bold policies, we risk missing the opportunities cities offer, especially given the growing concentration of populations in urban areas. It is essential that we address the drivers of urban biodiversity loss and conserve and restore nature so that urban populations can thrive.

In this United Nations Decade on Ecosystems Restoration, let us promote a life in harmony with nature in our cities. Only then can we avert the worst impacts of climate change and recharge biodiversity for the benefit of people and the planet.