



**Opening Remarks by H.E. Mr. Bob Rae (Canada)**

**President of the Economic and Social Council**

**8<sup>th</sup> High level Local and Regional Governments Forum**

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Thank you so much, merci beaucoup, muchas gracias a todos. I'm very, very grateful for the opportunity to say a few words.

Like many of you, I have a political background — not so much a diplomatic one. So I will not speak only the language of diplomacy. I will speak the language that I think all of us understand.

I'm very grateful for the opportunity to do so, and I appreciate the kind words that have been said.



These are the last few weeks of my term as President of the Economic and Social Council. We'll be celebrating our 80th birthday in January under the new leadership of my colleague from Nepal, Ambassador Thapa. I'm pleased to be here not only as President of ECOSOC and as Canada's Ambassador to the UN, but also as a former leader of a provincial government in my home country. Many years ago, I was Premier of Ontario, Canada's largest province, and I can assure you I understand not only the important — but frankly the critical — role that local and regional governments play in the life of the world.

There's one thing I really want to say to all of you: the SDGs are in trouble because too many countries are not fully committed to the idea of sustainable development.



So, the first thing I want to say is that sustainable development is not a theology — it is a necessity. It's not a nice-to-have; it's a must-have.

The future of life on the planet depends on our ability to control and reduce the emissions that are causing such dramatic change in all of our countries. And we're losing time. We're not moving quickly enough.

We are moving, and the Sustainable Development Goals are ambitious — but it's very important for us to understand why they matter.

Climate change is a reality. It is not a hoax. It is not something created by a bunch of professors in different universities. It is real. And the lack of sustainability in how we produce wealth in the world is the most important challenge the planet is facing.



If governments think they can play around and pretend these events aren't happening, they're wrong. They're making a mistake and missing the point.

Most of what happens depends on what happens in our cities and in our regional governments. The most important thing we can do is fully integrate the thinking, the science, and the evidence around the SDGs — and embed them deeply in the life of our local governments and our local populations.

The old saying that we have to think globally but act locally is true. It is absolutely correct. We have to act locally. And while some other levels of government may wander off in their own direction — because they have some other political fantasy they're pursuing — it is critically important that local governments stay the course and integrate



everything that's going on into their budgets, their policies, and their approaches.

You are it. When it comes to pushing this agenda forward, you are the ones who make it happen. The UN can pass resolutions — we do that very well — but resolutions alone won't solve this. It's the changes on the ground that will shift behaviour, reduce emissions, and build resilience. Those are the things that need to happen.

So, I want to express my deep appreciation to all of you for being here. I haven't always been able to come, but I'm very glad I was able to this year. One of your number, Mayor Vrbancovic, is on my case constantly — and I'm glad that he is. He's a good friend, and his advocacy and good cheer have been a critical part of my own education, as well as the work we're all doing.



As much as I'd like to speak forever, that's it — that's my message.

We have work to do. You are a critical part of that work. We need you to stay with us on the frontlines, and we need you to be engaged at every level to make the battle for the SDGs a success. It's a battle we can win — but it will require enormous determination and action by local and regional governments.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you so much.