

LET US RECONCILE CITIES WITH NATURE

As we celebrate World Environment Day, many of us isolated at home, the COVID-19 pandemic provides a sobering opportunity to reflect on our relationship with nature.

Nature provides us with essential life-supporting services such as food, clean water, medication and habitats. Healthy and diverse ecosystems contribute to making our communities more resilient. Countless studies have also demonstrated that interacting with nature positively impacts our mental and physical health and well-being, helping to alleviate stress and anxiety, especially prevalent at this time.

Yet, according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), biodiversity continues to decline in every region of the world, significantly reducing nature's capacity to contribute to people's well-being. This alarming trend endangers economies, livelihoods, food security, and quality of life of people everywhere. And our troubled relationship with nature makes us more vulnerable to hazards, such as extreme climate events and pandemics.

It is time to reimagine humanity's relationship with nature.

Governments around the world, citizens from all walks of life, economists, scientists, we all need to rethink how we can do things differently. The current pandemic, sadly, provides us with an opportunity to do so.

As for cities, we are already in this mindset and on this path. We redesign streets to facilitate active transportation and reduce our carbon footprint. We rethink the use of public space, to make it more enjoyable, accessible to all, and functional. We bring nature back into our rapidly urbanizing world, by creating parks and involving citizens in the protection of wildlife, such as creating corridors for the migration of the amazing monarch butterfly across North America.

By planning our cities *with* nature, we can improve quality of life now and lay the ground for a sustainable future for the next generations.

We are not only dreaming the city of tomorrow – we are building it now, integrating nature-based solutions in our development approach.

As we grapple with massive challenges, let us not return to business as usual.

Together, let's take strong action to create vibrant and equitable communities, where people and biodiversity can thrive, in urban areas as well as around the world.

Let's rally for the planet and for ourselves, by living in harmony with nature

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